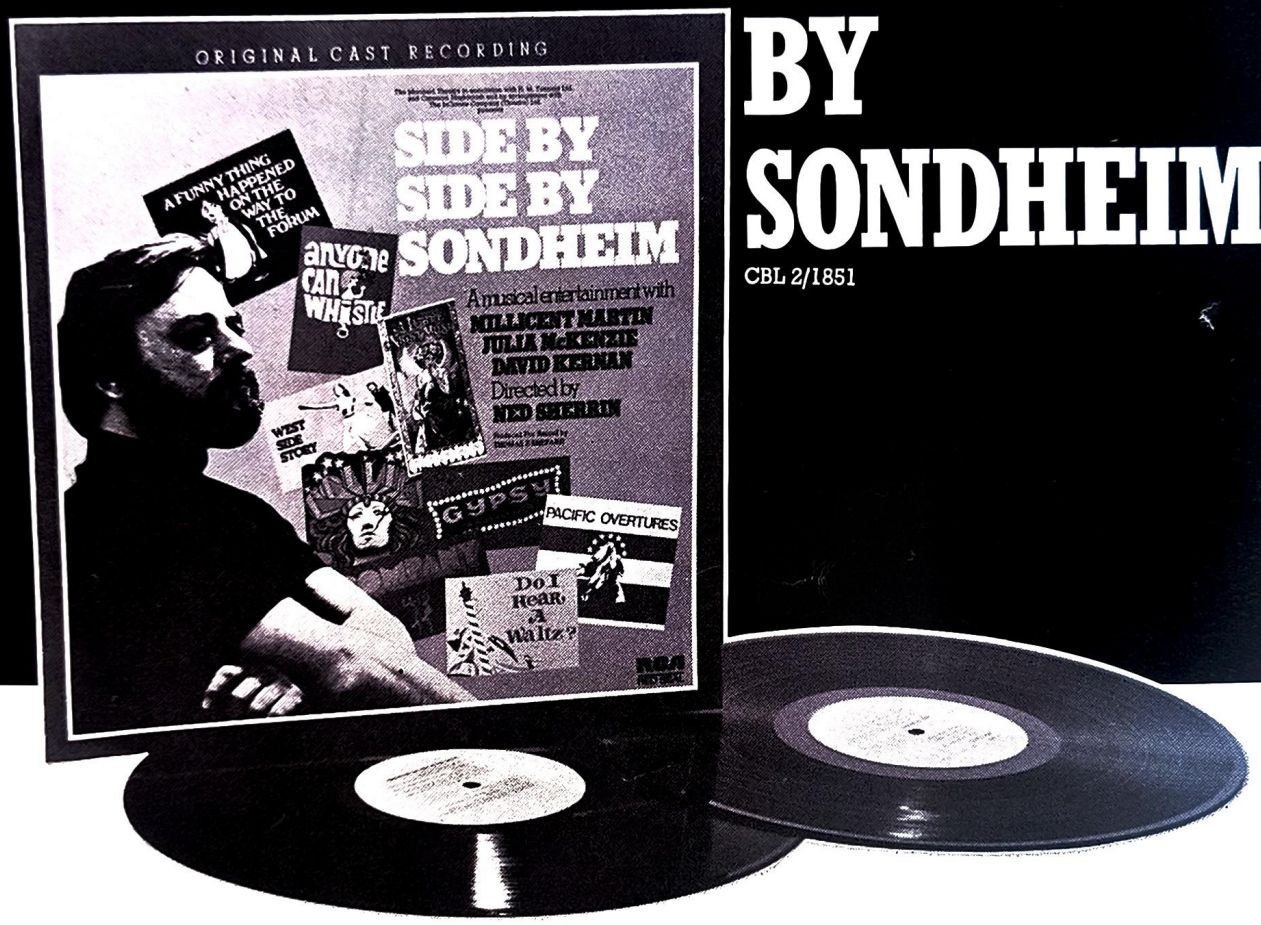
august 1976 50p

plays and players

A Chorus Line

THE FOUR SIDES OF 'SIDE BY SIDE BY SONDHEIM'



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plays and players

August 1976 Vol 23 No 11 Issue No 274 Founded 1953

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COVER PHOTO BY MARTHA SWOPE: The finale of *A Chorus Line* at Drury Lane

Michael Bennett, director, choreographer and creator of *A Chorus Line*, interviewed this month
Photograph: Ian Cook

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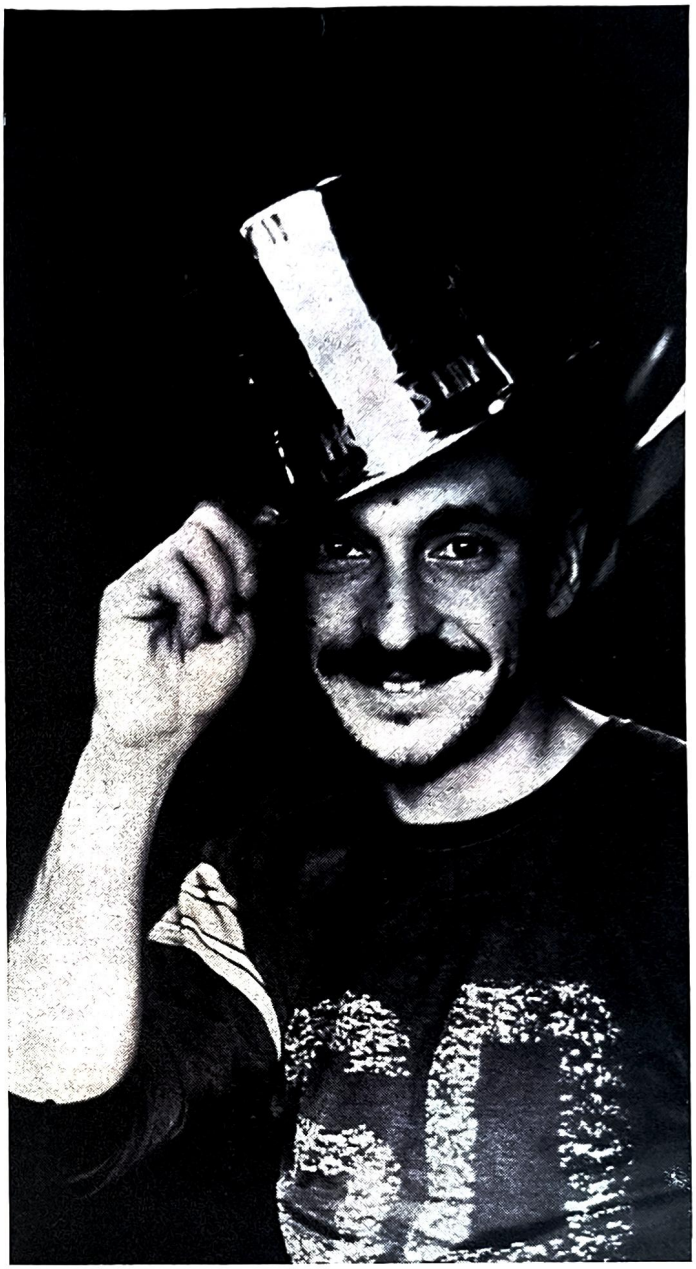

first nights

Aug 3: M PERRICHON'S TRAVELS (Chichester) Rex Harrison makes his Chichester debut in a farce by Labiche and Martin (the former best known for *The Italian Straw Hat,* but a sadly neglected and interesting dramatist), directed by Patrick Garland with sets by Eileen Diss and costumes by Robin Fraser Paye. Also in the cast are Keith Michell, Bill Fraser, Tony Robinson, Clive Francis, Andrew Sachs and Deborah Grant.

Aug 16: CLOUDS (Hampstead Theatre) Michael Frayn's second new play in a month is again directed by Michael Rudman, and in the cast are Barbara Ferris, Nigel Hawthorne, Olu Jacobs, James Berwick and Paul Chapman.

Aug 17: TROILUS AND CRESSIDA (Stratford-upon-Avon) Mike Gwylim and Francesca Annis play title roles in John Barton's third production in recent years of this great play.

This month

The West End was given a healthy injection of quality with the arrival at the Cambridge of Jonathan Miller's production of *Three Sisters,* but even that is not likely to last for long because the production originated at Guildford and the actors, not able, understandably, to bank on a London run, have already committed themselves to other assignments. *P&P* witnesses a striking entertainment by Welfare State at the new city of Milton Keynes and reflects on what went wrong with *Dimetos.* Few kind words this month from our reviewers on three musicals that opened and we should point out that all comments in our re-modelled London Playguide contain editorial opinion not necessarily shared by *P&P* contributors. London no doubt hopes that *A Chorus Line* will live up to its advance reputation, the show to be reviewed next month by John Lahr, who will also be taking a look at *We Came to the River,* Henze's new opera at Covent Garden for which Edward Bond has provided the libretto. J C Trewin pays tribute to Dame Sybil Thorndike and Christopher Hampton, by way of introduction to this month's playtext, offers an appreciation of the work of Peter Gill.

London Playguide

All information correct at time of going to press. When telephoning from outside London dial 01 before the number given

Adelphi (836 7611): **Irene** with Jon Pertwee, Jessie Evans, Eric Flynn, Julie Anthony. Dir Freddie Carpenter. Surprisingly competent stab at 'twenties musical, not too much regard for period but vivacious choreography, beautiful costumes. Reviewed this month. Recommended

Abery (836 3878): **Equus** by Peter Shaffer with Colin Blakely, Petra Markham, Glynn Owen and Gerry Sundquist. Dir John Dexter. Selling more tickets than any other straight play in London, it boasts the great Colin Blakely as Dysart. Stunning direction. This NT revival reviewed June 76.

Aldwych (836 6404): Plays in RSC repertory. **The Iceman Cometh** by Eugene O'Neill with Alan Tilvern, Norman Rodway, Bob Hoskins, Patrick Stewart, Kenneth Cranham. Dir Howard Davies. Seminal bar-room play last seen in London 1958. Reverent production of a naturalistic, flawed masterpiece. Reviewed this month. Recommended. **The Devil's Disciple** by Bernard Shaw with Patience Collier, Tom Conti, Estelle Kohler, John Wood. Dir Jack Gold. Last London production at the Shaw in 1971.

Ambassadors (836 1171): **Happy as a Sandbag** by Ken Lee. Dir Philip Hedley. Nostalgic musical revue of Second World War follies. Jolly memories for survivors of the Blitz. Reviewed Dec 75.

Apollo (437 2663): **Confusions** by Alan Ayckbourn with Pauline Collins, John Alderton. Dir Alan Strachan. Five Ayckbourn snippets well directed with a quality cast. Reviewed July 76.

Arts (836 3334): **Dirty Linen** by Tom Stoppard with Peter Bowles, Richard Goolden, Stephen Moore, Luan Peters. Dir Ed Berman. Minor Stoppard comedy as a Select Committee investigates Parliamentary Members' high-jinks. Interrupted by brilliant bicentenary tribute to naturalisation of Ed Berman whose direction is good but not that good. Reviewed June 76.

Cambridge (836 6056): **Three Sisters** by Chekhov with Janet Suzman, Nigel Davenport, Angela Down, Susan Engel. Dir Jonathan Miller. Brilliant behavioural direction full of telling, original detail. Superb design by Patrick Robertson. Imported from the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford. Reviewed this month. Recommended.

Collegiate (387 9629): **Cary Rick Dances the Bible.** American dancer, actor and mime Cary Rick in one-man show (Aug 3-14).

Comedy (930 3216) **Getting Away With Murder** is a new mystery thriller by J Lee Tompson (best known as the film director of Guns of Navarone, Tiger Bay and Ice Cold in Alex) that suddenly finds a London haven after a lengthy tour due to the demise of Signed and Sealed. Dir Robert Chetwyn. Cast headed by Barry Foster, Anthony Bate and Ernest Clark. Reviewed next month.

Criterion (930 3216): **The Family Dance** by Felicity Browne with Alec McCowen, Michael Bryant, Judy Parfitt, Annette Crosbie. Dir Jonathan Hales. Life among a self-lacerating middle-aged boozy household while the youngsters enjoy themselves unseen off-stage. The cast are so good they could do just as well with the telephone directory. Another example of H M Tennent's finding a new play to feed a public appetite for throwback boulevard. Reviewed this month.

Drury Lane (836 8108): **A Chorus Line** devised, choreographed and directed by Michael Bennett. New York's biggest musical bonanza of the decade hits London. Oklahoma, My Fair Lady, West Side Story and now, apparently, **A Chorus Line.** Reviewed next month.

Duchess (836 8243): **Oh! Calcutta!** devised by Kenneth Tynan. Dir Clifford Williams. It will be interesting to see how this long running, once innovative sex-spree fares when the next Tynan/Clifford Williams raunchy revue, Oh! Bangkok!, opens later this year at the Cambridge. Reviewed Sept 70.

Duke of York's (836 5122): **Salad Days** by Julian Slade and Dorothy Reynolds, with Elizabeth Seal, Sheila Steafel, Bill Kerr. Dir David Conville. After 20-odd years they're still 'looking for a piano' and you could get marks for chic by saying you loved Salad Days, hated A Chorus Line.

Fortune (836 6260): **Murder at the Vicarage** by Agatha Christie with Avril Angers, Derek Bond. Dir Donald Bodley. Doing splendid business to prove, as if The Mousetrap weren't proof enough, that an Agatha Christie thriller is bound to succeed.

Garrick (836 4601): **Funny Peculiar** by Mike Stott with Richard Beckinsale, Julie Walters, Peter Postlethwaite. Dir Alan Dossor. Agreeably breezy comedy about a misunderstood working-class Northerner in search of fellatio as opposed to normal West End emotional sympathy. Reviewed Mar 76, playtext April and May 76. Recommended.

Globe (437 1592): **Donkey's Years** by Michael Frayn with Penelope Keith, Peter Barkworth, Peter Jeffrey. Dir Michael Rudman. Comic study of awkwardness and embarrassment at an Oxford reunion.

Greenwich (858 7755): **Agamemnon**

Hampstead (722 9301): **Sparrowfall** by Alan Drury (to 14th), with Suzanne Bertish, Katherine Fahy, Michael Kitchen, John Price. Dir John Chapman. Businessman involved in shady financial affairs fakes fatal accident, but when he returns to life he finds himself far from welcome. Echoes of Hare, Barker, Brenton and Poliakoff. **Clouds** by Michael Frayn (from 16th), with Barbara Ferris, Nigel Hawthorne, Olu Jacobs, James Berwick, Paul Chapman. Dir Michael Rudman.

Haymarket (930 9832): **On Approval** by Frederick Lonsdale with Edward Woodward, Geraldine McEwan, Stephanie Beacham, Geoffrey Palmer. Dir Frank Hauser. Revival of sub-Coward comedy set in 1927. Admirable cast and inventive production but the lines do not match the humour of the performances. Reviewed Mar 76.

Her Majesty's (930 6606): **Ipi Tombi.** Dir Bert Egnos. Feathers, assegais and lots of native rhythm from a colourful, energetic cast. South Africa's answer to Expresso Bongo?

King's Head (226 1916): **Elizabeth I** by Paul Foster (from 3rd). Dir Sue Wilson. An Elizabethan romp portraying the Queen's unpredictable relationship with Mary Queen of Scots, Philip of Spain et al.

King's Road Theatre (352 7488): **The Rocky Horror Show** by Richard O'Brien with Raynor Bourton, Chris Malcolm (original cast members returned), Ziggy Byfield, Perry Bedden. Dir Jim Sharman. Camp reworking of the Frankenstein legend. In its fourth years it's as hilarious, nostalgic, flattering, spoofy, hectic, loud and daft as ever. Reviewed Aug 73.

Lyric (437 3686): **The Bed Before Yesterday** by Ben Travers with John Moffatt, Sheila Hancock, Jonathan Cecil. Dir Lindsay Anderson. Jolly sex comedy recounting the transformation of a repressed spinster into a rampaging man-hunter and proving that the grand old master of farce hasn't lost his touch. Reviewed Feb 76. Recommended.

Lyttelton (928 2252): Plays in repertory. **Weapons of Happiness** by Howard Brenton with Geoffrey Bateman, Julie Covington, Frank Finlay. Dir David Hare. First commissioned new play at Lyttelton. **Plunder** by Ben Travers with Diana Quick, Frank Finlay, Polly Adams, Dinsdale Landen. Dir Michael Blakemore. Excellent performances in this mature work as steely, well-oiled, beautifully machined as the Bank of England. Full of surprises. Reviewed Mar 76. **Watch It Come Down** by John Osborne with Jill Bennett, Frank Finlay, Susan Fleetwood. Dir Bill Bryden. Osborne insists on telling us everything and showing us almost nothing. A wordy storm in a whisky tumbler by a dramatist increasingly adrift in his own skull. Reviewed April 76. **The Playboy of the Western World** by John Millington Synge with Stephen Rea, Susan Fleetwood, Margaret Whiting, J G Devlin. Reviewed Jan 76. **Blithe Spirit** by Noël Coward with Richard Johnson, Maria Aitken, Rowena Cooper. Dir Harold Pinter. Reviewed this month.

Mayfair (629 3036): **What's a Nice Country Like U.S.—Doing In a State Like This?** lyrics by Ira Gasman, music by Cary Hoffman. Dir Michael Quinn McAloney. Bicentennial capers with a competent revue cast.

Mermaid (248 7656): **Some Of My Best Friends Are Husbands** by Hugh Leonard with Patrick Cargill, Hugh Paddick. Dir James Grout. Comedy set in Paris in 1910 with Patrick Cargill as the middle-aged man after a nubile 18-year-old bride. The husbands of his two previous mistresses turn up on his wedding day. Reviewed next month.

New London (405 0072): **Leave Him To Heaven** by Ken Lee with Brian Protheroe. Dir Philip Hedley. Rock 'n' Roll musical using a schoolboy's rise to stardom as an excuse for reviving some 'fifties golden oldies. Cacophonous music and poor choreography. Strictly for rockers. Reviewed this month.

Old Vic (928 7616): **The White Devil** by John Webster with Glenda Jackson, Patrick Magee, Colin Campbell, Jonathan Pryce. Dir Michael Lindsay-Hogg. Jacobean tragedy seething with corruption, violence and treachery. Glenda Jackson plays the splendid Vittoria. First production at Old Vic since NT deserted it in March.

Open Air Regent's Park (486 2431): **Love's Labour's Lost** with Richard Goolden, Anthony Sharp, Ursula Mohan. Dir David Conville. New auditorium at Regent's Park is worth a visit and no Shakespeare play could benefit more from night's descent.

Open Space (580 4970): **Seven Girls** written and directed by Carl-Johanseth. British premiere of Swedish play set in an open prison in Sweden and focusing on the problems of seven adolescent prisoners.

Palace (437 6834): **Jesus Christ Superstar** by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, with Steve Alder. Dir Jim Sharman. Originally brilliant production by Jim Sharman, still here by tourists' demand proving that anything Agatha Christie can do Jesus can too.

Phoenix (836 8611): **The Pleasure Of His Company** by Samuel Taylor with Douglas Fairbanks Jnr, Wilfrid Hyde White, Dinah Sheridan. Dir Peter Dews. Douglas Fairbanks Jnr's return to the West End after 42 years coincides with the demise of the subscription season at the Phoenix.

Piccadilly (437 4506): **Very Good, Eddie** by Jerome Kern and Guy Bolton with Nigel Williams, Prue Clarke, Gita Denise. Dir Bill Gile. Resuscitated musical with excellent lyrics when you can hear them. No plot but good songs, costumes and set. Reviewed June 76.

Prince of Wales (930 8681): **Mardi Gras** by Melvyn Bragg, Alan Blaikley and Ken Howard, with Nicky Henson, Dana Gillespie, Pepsi Maycock, Marsha Hunt. Dir Clifford Williams. Unmemorable songs and poor choreography enlivened by a cavalcade of whores, gamblers and salvationists enacting one of the few great Western rituals. Reviewed May 76.

Queen's (734 1166): **Otherwise Engaged** by Simon Gray with Michael Gambon, Rosemary Martin, David Baron, Edmund Kente, Bruce Bould, Jane Cussons, Anthony Pedley. Winner of all the awards is still packing them in to prove that if critics vote safely at least they sometimes know what the public wants.

Regent (323 2707): **Let My People Come** by Earl Wilson Jnr. Dir Phil Oesterman. Sticky revue featuring fat female nude as figure of fun, several well-hung boys and instruction in finer points of sexual expertise.

Round House (267 2564): **La Grande Eugène** devised and directed by Franz Salieri. Initially seductive but tediously repetitive cabaret of transvestite tableaux. Beautiful bodies, ordinary choreography and packed out for the summer.

Royal Court (730 1745): **T Zee and the Lost Race** by Richard O'Brien, with Paul Nicholas, Diane Langton, Warren Clarke, Richard O'Brien. Dir Nicholas Wright. Tooth of Crime, Teeth 'n' Smiles

Helen Lindsay, Alec McCowen and Annette Crosbie in Felicity Browne's The Family Dance *at the Criterion Theatre* *Photograph: Dominic*

and now another Court play interspersed with rock music.

Savoy (856 8888): **Banana Ridge** by Ben Travers with Robert Morley, George Cole, Joan Sanderson. Dir Val May. Revival of 1938 farce set in Malaya.

Shaftesbury (836 6596): **Liza of Lambeth** by William Rushton and Berny Stringle after Somerset Maugham with Bryan Marshall, Patricia Hayes, Christopher Neil, Angela Richards. Dir Berny Stringle. Vastly expensive musical which raids Somerset Maugham for a Cockney knees-up and refuses to lie down. Reviewed this month.

Shaw (388 1394): **Black Comedy** and **White Liars** (to 7th) by Peter Shaffer with Timothy Dalton, Maggie Fitzgibbon. Dir Paul Giovanni. **Black Comedy** stands up as one of the more brilliant theatrical ideas of recent years but the production lacks the startling precision of John Dexter's original. **White Liars** is Shaffer's third version of an intractable tale about the death of a homosexual relationship in a clairvoyant's seedy seaside tent. National Youth Theatre Season follows with 'Three Comedies of Youth': **Stag Night** by Willis Hall, **Here Comes the Sun** by Barrie Keeffe, **The Under-Manager** by Peter Terson.

St Martin's (836 1443): **The Mousetrap** by Agatha Christie.

Strand (836 2660): **No Sex Please, We're British** by Anthony Marriott and Alistair Foot, with Doris Hare, McDonald Hobley, Arthur Howard, Barry McGinn. Dir Allan Davis. Long-running sex thriller now in 6th hysterical year originally good for an inimitably physical performance by Michael Crawford.

St George's (609 1198): Plays in repertory. **Richard III** with Alan Badel. Dir Douglas Campbell. **Romeo and Juliet** with Peter McEnery, Sarah Badel. Dir George Murcell. **Twelfth Night** with Eric Porter, Lynn Farleigh. Dir Frank Hauser. Still battling with poor acoustics. Ordinary productions but with several impressive performances.

Theatre Royal, Stratford (534 0310): **Planet of the Apes,** based on TV series. Afternoon kids' show. **The Father** in evenings (to 21st).

Theatre Upstairs (730 2554): **The Only Way Out** by George Thatcher. Dir David Halliwell. Written while Thatcher was in prison and seen a couple of years ago at the Little Theatre.

Vaudeville (836 9988): **Baggage** by Lee Langley with Gerald Harper, Hannah Gordon, Una Stubbs, Prunella Gee. Dir Val May. Funny enough as we watch Gerald Harper's menopausal lady-killer getting his come-uppance but dreary when he starts ruminating on the folly of his ways.

Victoria Palace (834 1317): **A Bedful of Foreigners** by Dave Freeman with June Whitfield and Terry Scott. Dir Roger Redfarn. With this cast you can safely assume the show is nothing to do with overcrowding of illegal immigrants in Brixton.

Wyndham's (836 3028): **Side by Side by Sondheim,** musical revue by Stephen Sondheim et al with Millicent Martin, Julia McKenzie, David Kernan, Ned Sherrin. Dir Ned Sherrin. Cabaret-style tribute to the last of the great lyric writers. You go out humming the tunes as long as you came in knowing them. Reviewed last month.

Young Vic (928 2252): Plays in NT repertory. **Troilus and Cressida** with Philip Locke, Diana Quick, Simon Ward. Dir Elijah Moshinsky. Confusing play left confusing by this uncut version bereft of directional focus. **Emigrés** by Slawomir Mrozek with Brian Cox and Jim Norton. Dir Kevin Billington. Mrozek, a leading European dramatist, was stripped of his Polish citizenship in 1968 after denouncing the invasion of Czechoslovakia. His full-length Tango was staged by the RSC in 1966.

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letters

LAVATORY HUMOUR

HAVING BEEN OUT of the country for several months, may I be allowed, once again, the courtesy of your columns to give voice to several complaints that might be shared by others among your readership who still find the energy, in these dog days, to follow the London Theatre.

I am not usually one to be diverted from a consideration of the entertainment on the stage by more minor considerations of physical comfort in the stalls. But visits in recent weeks to the Aldwych to see *The Zykovs* and *The Iceman Cometh* have been marred by the strange air-conditioning at this address that blows across the auditorium like a chill wind. This must constitute a hazard to the health of Aldwych loyalists who, these days, enter upon the icy blast from the overbearing heat outside. Should they then decide to purchase liquid refreshment in the stalls bar (not always advisable, I admit, when coming to grips with the intellectual demands of a Gorky or O'Neill) they encounter there an oven-like temperature not easily ignored despite the cheerful, co-operative service of the staff. My female companion on each occasion described the toilet facilities in the stalls as 'disgusting' and I cannot really claim anything better than that for the Gentlemen's.

Along with everyone else I enjoyed that civilised evening's entertainment at the Mermaid, *Side By Side By Sondheim*, but I fail to see the relevance of Mr Ned Sherrin's remarks about Mr Jeremy Thorpe and the Liberal Party that he threw in on the evening I attended. Mr Sherrin made a good living about ten years ago from his acerbically irreverent remarks about figures in public life when he hosted a TV satire show called *That Was The Week That Was*. One hoped he would have grown out of that sort of thing and, indeed, the majority of his contribution to the Sondheim show consists of delightful personal anecdotes concerning his friendship with the composer and generous critical comment on his work. He should have left it at that: I fear that Mr Sherrin does not appreciate the general mood, currently running through the country, of tired resentment at the continual sniping and snooping that public figures of repute and achievement are constantly subjected to. Let me not be misunderstood: there was not a trace of unpleasant innuendo or libellous allegation in Mr Sherrin's remarks; just that rather old-hat sense of dropping a name that is sure of getting a laugh.

BASIL INCHING,
108 Garrison Lane, Felixstowe.

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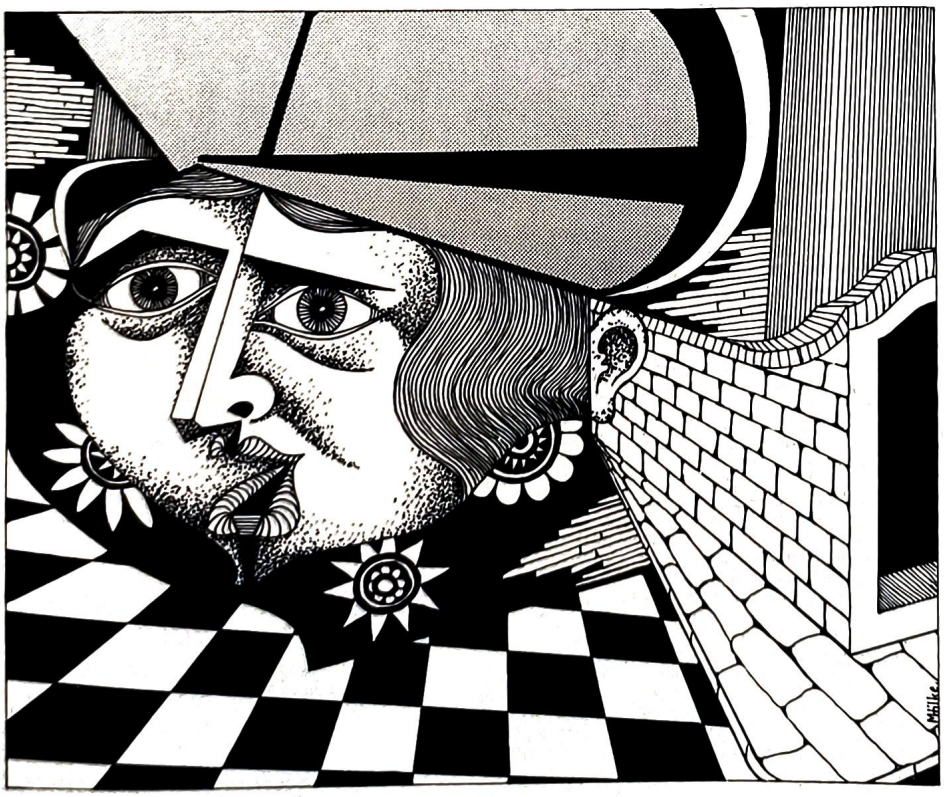

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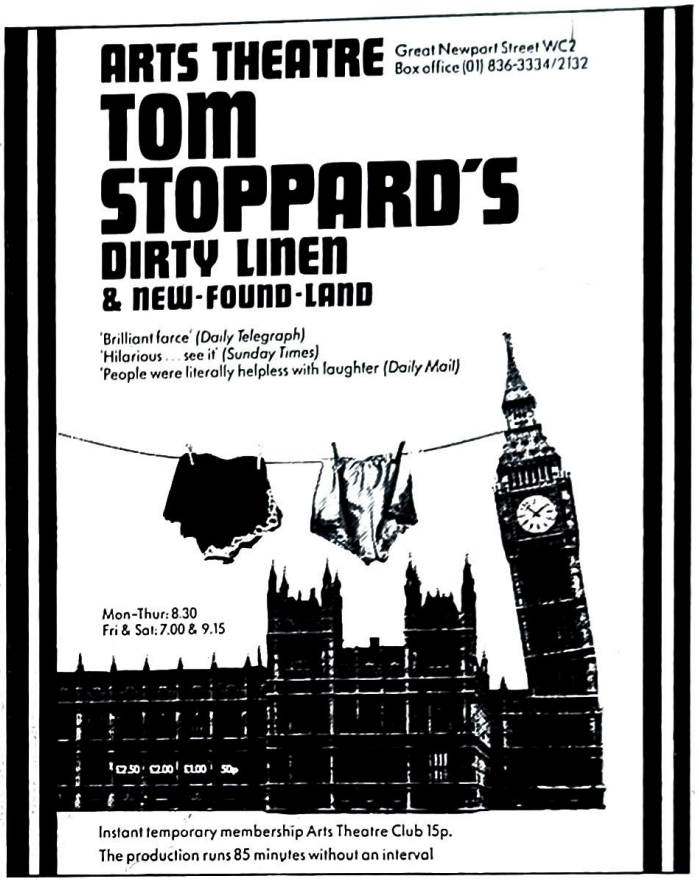
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FIVE WEEK SUMMER WORKSHOP 1976 MID JULY/MID AUGUST

One notable victim of the current quick turnover of plays in the West End was the sudden demise last month of Signed and Sealed *at the Comedy, adapted from Feydeau by Christopher Hampton and starring Peggy Mount and Kenneth Williams. The production will be considered next month by Alan Brien in conjunction with the new Hugh Leonard farce at the Mermaid*
Photograph Christina Burton

cues

Despite its value in documenting the processes by which money arrives in artists' hands, **Lord Redcliffe-Maud's report on arts patronage in England and Wales** (published by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation) is yet another unreadable, self-congratulatory tract on how well we're all doing with the usual unqualified emphases on our status as 'a nation of world class in the arts'. Redcliffe-Maud's major recommendations are concerned with the decentralisation of administrative power in the arts, so that local government, unhindered by Parliament, should have more of a say in what projects should be funded from public money; and more Arts Council power should be devolved to the ever-proliferating Regional Arts Associations. Local authorities at both county and district levels are urged to consult together with RAA's to produce 'county art development plans', whose purpose, apart from giving useful employment to the bulging ranks of artistic bureaucrats, will be 'to help concentrate resources and clarify the objectives and roles of the three levels of organisation, and the use of their concurrent powers of patronage.' So, increased support all round through national, regional and local organisations. More and more people deciding who should have what and, in effect, what that what should be.

Although the report addresses itself to a consideration of how subsidy for British art should be organised, it is good that, however fleetingly, Redcliffe-Maud bemoans the insularity of the arts, the fact that we see insufficient of the arts of other nations. **P&P** often travels abroad to foreign festivals at the invitation of the host country. And yet we as a country never seem to repay the compliment by inviting foreign journalists to Edinburgh or Stratford-upon-Avon. When the organisers of the BITEF festival in Belgrade recently visited London to invite a British production to participate in the tenth anniversary festival this year, the British Council suggested that they take an ordinary production of **Twelfth Night** from Chichester. Needless to say, that puny suggestion was thrown out and Joint Stock's revival of **The Speakers** will represent us in September. The kind of theatre the British Council likes to see representing Britain abroad is all too often the kind of theatre Redcliffe-Maud and his friends are talking about in phrases like 'world class', 'future of the arts' and 'development plans'. The National and the RSC are held up as organisations to emulate, although production standards and calibre of repertory are arguably lower than at any time in the past ten years. But that is where, in the theatre sector, the biggest amounts of public money are concentrated. So it is unsurprising that a report like this just bundles through its proposals with the preface: 'The major national companies are cornerstones of the theatre profession and essential standard-setters. Their position must be safeguarded in the present period, and it is marvellous that at last after so many years of patient struggle we have a National Theatre Company housed in a building worthy of it.'

After controversial productions of lesser plays of John Osborne and Noel Coward (complete with detachable NT cast in case of West End transfer?), we learn that **William Douglas Home's Kingfisher,** to which Ralph Richardson is already committed, will play briefly at the National in a production by Peter Hall before transferring to a commercial venue. Plans for the revival of **Waste** by Harley Granville Barker have been temporarily shelved due to the resignation of Michael Blakemore.

The ICA Theatre are in danger of damaging their reputation by pursuing a silly public relations line of peevish complaint that no-one, with the exception of **Time Out,** reviewed their International Fringe season last month. This month the theatre is mounting a summer festival of 'the best of contemporary British theatre'. Lunchtime shows are Major Road in

Dame Sybil Thorndike died, aged 93, on 9 June and was honoured with a memorial service in Westminster Abbey on 2 July Sir John Gielgud gave the address and there were readings by Sir Ralph Richardson and Paul Scofield. J C Trewin remembers the grand lady on page 39, but we start the picture album here with shots of Thorndike (left) on the site of the theatre named after her at Leatherhead in 1967 and (right) as Shaw's Saint Joan at the Lyceum in 1926

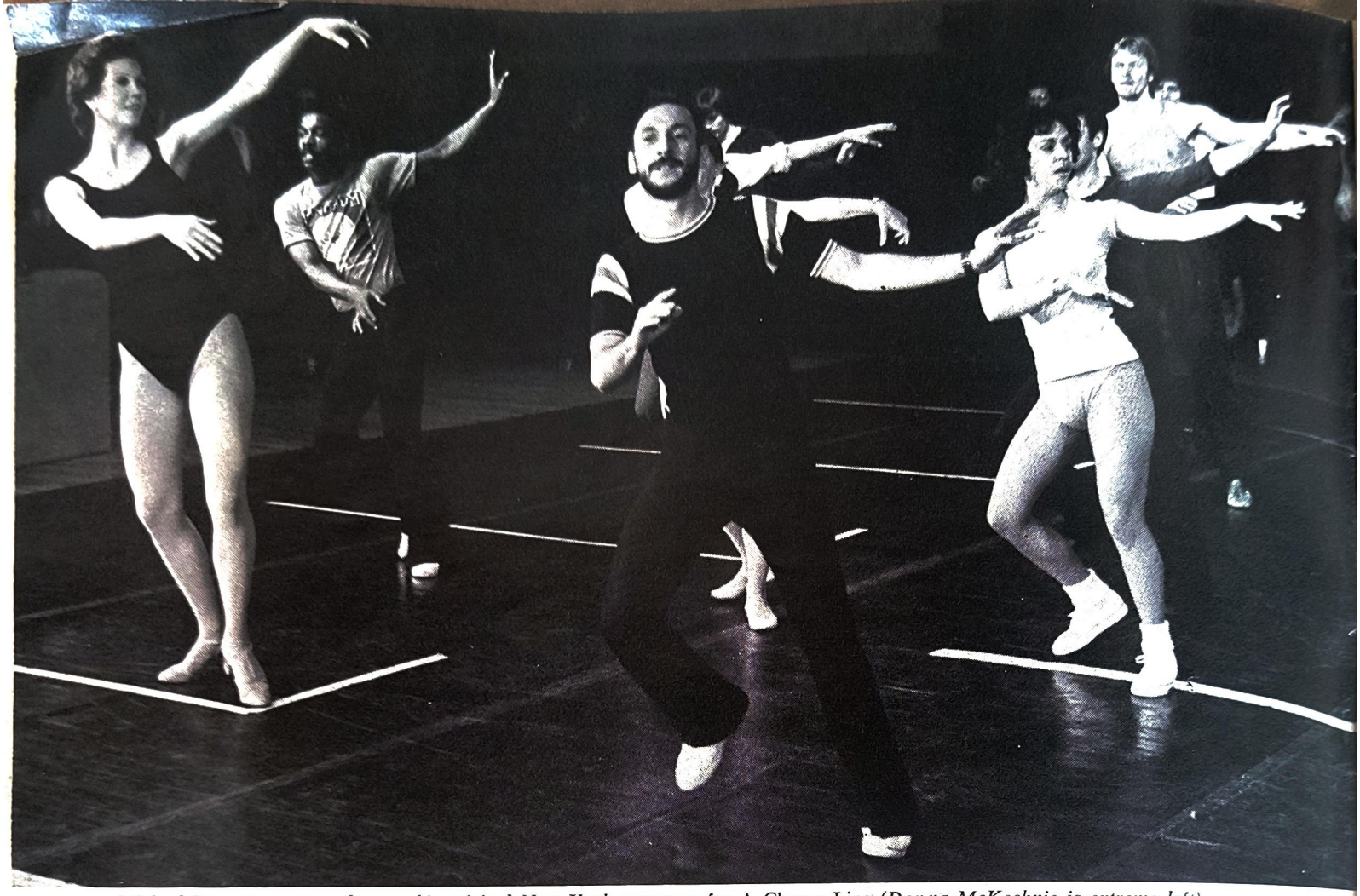
former colleague Steve Grant's **Marx and Sparks** (20-31 July); the Soho Poly production of Alan Drury's **Communion** (4-14 August); and the Black Theatre of Brixton in Jamal Ali's **Dark Days, Light Nights** (24 Aug-4 Sept). Evening shows from Recreation Ground, Wakefield Tricycle, the American transexual outfit, Hot Peaches, and The People Show.

The Edinburgh Festival runs from 23 August to 11 September and while the official drama programme looks a little more promising than usual—with visits from the New York La Mama in their Greek trilogy, the Birmingham Rep and the Royal Court—the fringe programme looks as timelessly attractive and high-spirited as ever. The Entertainment Machine is presenting the Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomen's Guild Dramatic Society in **Macbeth** (Mrs Jennings has cut short her holiday in Torremolinos in order to tackle the title role); the Cambridge Misfit Theatre present **Oscar** by Geoff Nicholson, a play that 'draws on Sartre, Beckett, Leary, Robert Crumb et al and raises two metaphysical fingers to the lot of them'; Armpit Theatre present **Twisted Cues and Elliptical Balls** in which 'Alfred Kettle, one of life's no-hopers, considers his position as stage doorman at the Savoy Theatre to be the result of forces beyond his control'; and students of Middlesex Polytechnic offer **Marcius,** a rock opera in two acts based on Shakespeare's **Coriolanus.** Ambitious programmes, as usual, from Oxford and Cambridge as well as visits from Quentin Crisp, Leonard Maguire, Andy Andrews and, in a musical tribute, Lorenz Hart. Tadeusz Kantor's performance group from Poland are once again at the Richard Demarco gallery.

One understands Jonathan Miller's reluctance these days to write programme notes that rebound on him in the form of unfavourable reviews, but someone really should have come up with something better than the nauseating puff for the Larry Parnes Organisation in the current **Cambridge Theatre programme** for **Three Sisters.** For 20p you get a cast list, a couple of photographs, some excruciating actors' biographies ('June Ritchie trained at RADA and won the Ronson and Emile Littler awards, but says everybody makes mistakes'; 'Mike Hayward taught mathematics for two years, but only added to the children's confusion. Joined THE profession in 1972') and three pages of 'Hello Everybody' from Parnes. If theatres can't think of anything interesting to put in their programmes they should distribute free cast lists and leave it at that. All London programmes, with the exception of more informative efforts at the National, Aldwych and Royal Court are equally bad.

More discerning playgoers may remember the short run at the Royal Court towards the end of 1974 of **The Great Caper,** the result of a prophetic collaboration between Ken Campbell and **Ion Alexis Will.** Mr Will disappeared from the country shortly afterwards but has recently returned, worried by what appear to be libellous allegations about himself in an interview conducted in the November 1974 **P&P.** We are anxious to point out that the description of Mr Will as a sometime 'drugs smuggler' is totally without foundation and that Mr Will is not, nor has ever been, or, indeed, has any intention of becoming, a drugs smuggler. **P&P** tenders Mr Will our unreserved apologies and is anxious, too, to point out that the introduction to the **P&P** playtext of **The Great Caper** that appeared in the October 1974 **P&P** is entirely the work of Ken Campbell and that all sentiments therein attributed to Mr Will are fictional jests of Mr Campbell.

Summer attractions at the **Nottingham Playhouse** are the resident company in Coward's **Private Lives** (opens 29 July) and the visit of Dougie Squires' production of **Stop The World I Want To Get Off** (opens 17 August). **Stop The World** is presented by Charles Vance in association with Trends Management **(who?)** and features TV's healthily energetic dancing troupe, The Second Generation.



Michael Bennett, centre, rehearses his original New York company for A Chorus Line (*Donna McKechnie is extreme left).*
'A group of dancers sat around talking about why they were dancers and why they came to New York as opposed to, say, Hollywood or Las Vegas'

Photograph: Martha Swope

Leader of the dance

MICHAEL BENNETT, creator of A Chorus Line, talks to Clive Hirschhorn

CH: *Can you tell me something about the genesis of* A Chorus Line?

MB: *A Chorus Line* was the title of a play I did a number of years ago which came to Broadway as *Twigs* starring Sada Thompson. But I always thought, 'God, what a wonderful title! *A Chorus Line*!' That was about four years ago. Well, it so happened I'd always wanted to do a big dance-oriented musical, something on the scale of *West Side Story*; something that would have a cast of *dancers* as opposed to actors. In the past I've done shows with actors whom I taught how to move, but never a show that was intrinsically *with* dancers and was *about* dancers; in other words a show that would reflect everything I'd learned to understand about dancing—especially Broadway dancing.

Anyway, like everyone else, I went through the Summer of Watergate and I was very depressed by it all. And I decided my next show would say something positive about the quality of life in America today. For too long we've believed we were the greatest country in the world. We simply believed, naïvely, in our own propaganda. Well, with Watergate, our dignity took quite a beating, and one of the reasons the subject matter of *A Chorus Line* appealed to me, quite apart from the dance opportunities it offered, is that, basically, it's a show about dignity. It gives dignity to the boys and girls in the chorus who will never be stars. Unfortunately, in America today, you're either a star or you're nothing. If you're not the head of IBM or General Motors, you're a failure. Now I hate all of that, which is why, I guess, I hate evenings like the Tony Awards. Okay, so what if I win? Does that make everyone else losers? Also, *A Chorus Line* is a continuation of something I've been trying to do for years in terms of my own craft within the musical framework. You'll see, in *A Chorus Line*, the use of cinema techniques on the stage; the sort of techniques I started experimenting with in *Promises Promises* and *Follies*, which was four shows later than *Promises*, and very much in the evolution of that technique. In *A Chorus Line* I've got lots of 'jump cutting' so to speak, and the sort of 'focusing' you see on film. I think I've at last discovered a whole way of working on the stage that is very cinematic, but which still retains an essential 'theatricality'. That's from the craft standpoint. The other standpoint is that I believe the musical is an art form which is perfectly capable of saying serious things. And *A Chorus Line* is as 'serious' a musical as any I know.

CH: *It's only an art-form in America. The British still have a great deal to learn about structuring successful musicals.*

MB: Right. though I quite liked *Anne of Green Gables*. Though wasn't that Canadian, come to think of it? Anyway, the problem with England in terms of musicals, is that, whereas we draw our musical talent from two hundred million people across the States, you draw all your available musical talent from what, I guess, would be the size of New York State. Also, we have many more influences and cultures that intrude on our music and

dancing than you do—from negro spirituals, through ragtime, jazz and rock.

CH: *So far you've only done two shows in London:* Promises Promises *and* Company. *Did you find them frustrating to cast? I'm thinking, particularly, about the English cast of* Company.

MB: Yes. It was very hard. First of all, I never know where the best dancers are in your country. I assume they work in TV. That's what everyone tells me. Usually I call up people like Gillian Lynne and a few other choreographers I know, and I ask them who's good and who's available. I mean, I remember my audition for *Promises*. I needed nine boys for the show, and ten turned up! Now, out of that lot, only two were usable. I had to go scouting around to find the rest. Yes, it was very difficult indeed. Now, if you were a choreographer coming from London, I'd consult the enormous file on dancers I have, and in a few minutes, tell you where everybody is and what they're doing, what kind of dancers they are, and who specialises in what. I know them all because I've worked with them all. In London I'm at the mercy of the few people who show up at auditions. So it's very hard for me.

CH: *Is it true that hundreds of people auditioned for* A Chorus Line?

MB: Absolutely true. About 700. Plus a great deal more for the Los Angeles company and the London company.

CH: *When you're seeing as many as 700 people, how do you sort them all out in your mind?*

MB: Well, of the 700, I only actually *see* a certain number. First of all, I have a preliminary call in which they're basically 'typed' —and those who are clearly too young, or too old, or don't fit into any of the categories I'm looking for, are immediately eliminated. Then, I bring the others back—maybe 20 at a time, and take it from there, eliminating all the while until, eventually, I'm left with the company I want.

CH: *How much improvisation went into* A Chorus Line?

MB: The actual material that comes out of the actors mouths in the show itself amounts to about ten minutes of improvisation. The rest has been re-written from things that were said or discussed during our sessions. I do have a great deal of taped conversations which started the whole show rolling, and someday I hope to publish this material in book form.

CH: *Watergate obviously inspired you! Who made the original tapes?*

MB: A group of dancers who just sat around talking about why they were dancers, and why they came to New York as opposed to, say, Las Vegas or Hollywood.

CH: *In other words, why Broadway?*

MB: Yes. Why Broadway? For many years a Broadway dancer was looked down upon. If you weren't a ballet dancer, or did modern dance, you were regarded as some sort of hybrid; a 'gypsy', which is a term, incidentally, I detest. You'll notice it's never used in *A Chorus Line*. Not once. It has no dignity, and, as I said, the show says a great deal about dignity.

CH: *Now that you've done what is quintessentially a dance musical, what will you do next?*

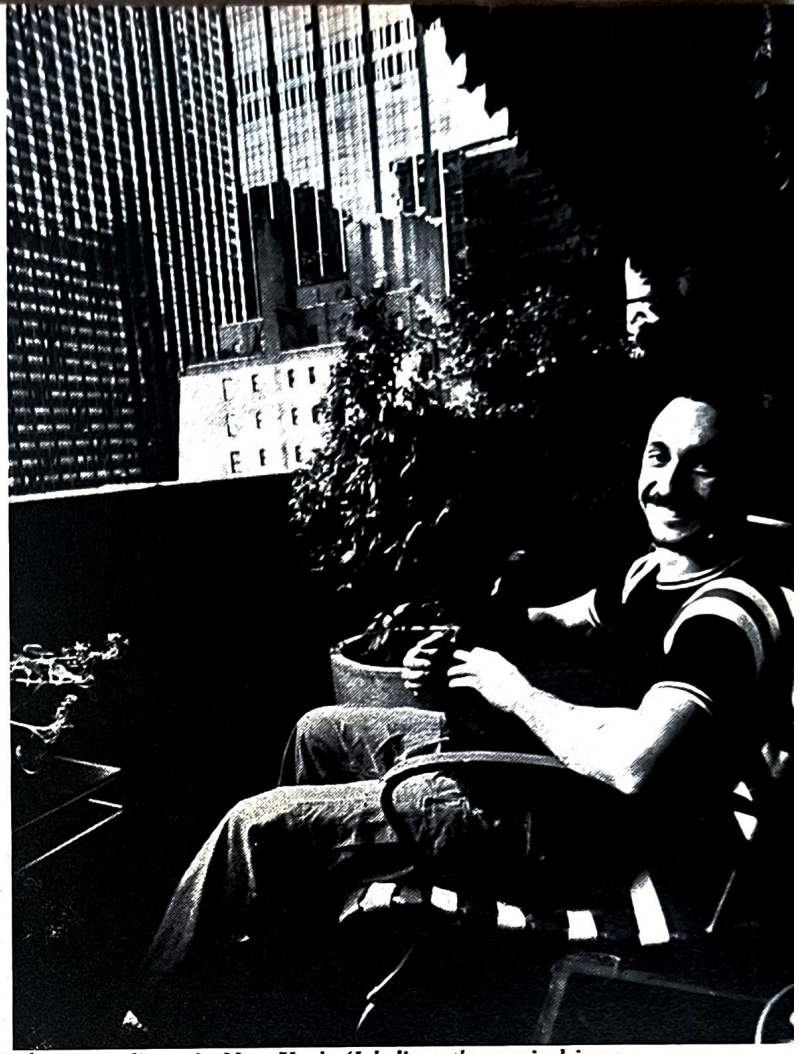
MB: For the theatre? Well, I've an idea in my head about a jazz musician—and that's about it. Right now I'm in the process of setting up a couple of movies. I've done 14 Broadway shows, and I'm just itching to do something in another medium. I'd also like to do a ballet. Possibly for Joffrey.

CH: *What about a film of* Follies?

MB: I'd *love* to do it. But with a new book. The book for the stage show didn't work at all. The trouble with *Follies* as a movie prospect, as far as I'm concerned, is that it's basically a backstage musical, and one of the films I'm working on at the moment is also a backstage musical. It's called *Pin-Ups* and it's about the 1940's. Then, of course, there'll be the movie version of *A Chorus Line*. Yet another backstage musical. And the very last thing I want is to be known as the king of the backstage musical!

CH: *How do you feel about the economic restrictions of Broadway today? The high cost of production?*

MB: It's a terrific problem. But restrictions and the necessity to work within a pre-defined framework often result in excellent work. Sometimes it's good and desirable *not* to have everything you want. Also, the *play's* the thing—not the sets and props. And

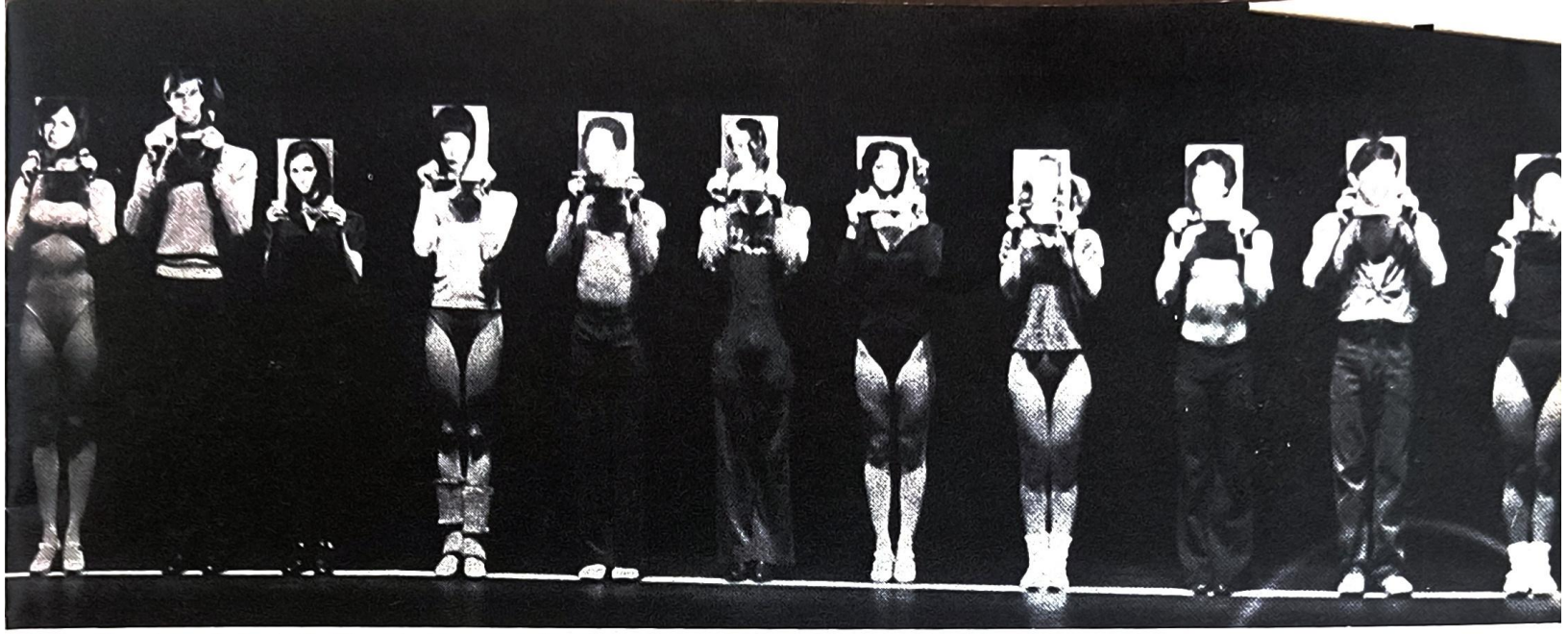


Bennett at home in New York: 'I believe the musical is an art form perfectly capable of saying serious things'
Photograph: Ian Cook

although I always use the very best designers around, and get the best orchestrators in the business, what ultimately counts, is the quality of the written word. Now *A Chorus Line* was very inexpensive to do off-Broadway, where, as you know, it started life (at Joseph Papp's Theatre Workshop—a government sponsored organisation). I simply found a way, in 1975, of staging it as economically and as effectively as possible. And, in a way, I'm as proud of this as I am of the actual accomplishments of the show. I spent much less money getting *A Chorus Line* from off-Broadway to Broadway than it costs most musicals to open on Broadway. I found all sorts of ways of getting round things that would normally have been prohibitive, because I had to. Also, I didn't have the hassle of meeting an out-of-town opening date. Believe it or not, I had nine months rehearsal time. So if, on a certain day, the creative juices failed to flow, rather than panic because every minute was costing money, I'd go home and hope that the next day things would be better. Working off-Broadway helped me to stay loose, and, as a result, I was probably a nicer person to work with and be with than ever before in my life. I also had the right to fail, commercially, because it was government money I was spending and not some backer's private capital. The whole thing worked so well, I just wish there were more theatre groups like the Workshop. So, I'm very optimistic that it *is* possible to do quality shows for realistic amounts of money. Broadway today is far too expensive to cut your teeth on. America no longer has Summer stock, and this is a pity. We really need places where people can learn their craft and, in the process, make mistakes. It's terrible working on a show, say, like *Coco*, which I choreographed, and which cost 1,200,000 dollars. That's one helluva responsibility. You find yourself working for 45 minutes on one light cue in a song that has 14 light cues, and you know that each cue is going to cost you upwards of six thousand dollars.

CH: *Can you give me an example of how your improvisation technique worked during rehearsals?*
MB: Well, one morning I pretended to fall and hurt my leg. I was faking, but everyone on stage thought it was for real, and a pretty scary atmosphere developed. Now, the point of the exercise was that I wanted everyone to know and to experience exactly what it felt like to have someone in the company injure himself. After that, I put a similar scene in the show and it worked very well because their reactions were all first hand. Don't forget, with the exception of Donna McKechnie, most of the company were all chorus people before they did *A Chorus Line*. Some of them had never spoken a single word on a stage in their lives before. As far as 'acting' and 'motivation' were concerned, they needed all the help they could get.
CH: *How flexible are you when you begin to stage a show like* A Chorus Line. *Are most of your ideas conceived and developed well in advance?*
MB: No. The very first thing I do is walk around the rehearsal room a lot and acclimatise myself to it. Then, very tentatively, I begin to try out different ideas—first on a very simple level. I never put any pressure on myself when I begin a piece, because

the pressure mounts anyway, and the looser you stay at the beginning, the more open you are to try crazier, way-out things. What I *do* have to have before I set out on a project, is a clear *mental* picture of what I want to say in the show. After that, it's just a matter of working it all out, step by step.
CH: *When did you first start dancing?*
MB: When I was three years old. In Buffalo. They tell me that whenever the radio was on, I'd dance around the room and only stop when it was switched off. An aunt of mine noticed this and took me to dance lessons. Once a week, every Saturday afternoon. I was too young to remember routines, so I used to improvise my own steps. My father is Sicilian and my mother a Russian German Jewess; and although I was brought up to be a Catholic, I used to perform at weddings and barmitzvahs. We were very poor and the extra money came in useful. As I got older I studied more and more and by the time I was nine I was going to dance lessons every day with a group called Mrs Dunn's Little Stars of Tomorrow. We used to perform at reformatories, veterans' hospitals, orphanages and crippled childrens' homes. When I was ten, I began to combine my dancing with acting classes. Already at that early age the theatre was my entire life.
CH: *What were your earliest influences?*
MB: That same aunt who started me dancing took me to the movies every week from the age of three onwards, and I seem to have seen every musical ever made! I particularly loved the Kelly and Astaire musicals. They were really special.
CH: *How did your parents feel about your dancing?*
MB: Oh, they were quite convinced I'd be the next Gene Kelly. No question about it. What they never realised was that I really wanted to be a choreographer. In fact, they didn't even know what the word meant, and it was only after they watched me choreographing a production of *West Side Story* in Pittsburgh when I was 21, that they knew what their son was into. Before that I mainly danced, and that's all they understood. I toured Europe in *West Side* when I was 17, and my first Broadway show as a dancer was *Subways Are For Sleeping* in 1958, a month and a half after I came back from Europe. Boy dancers who are any good never have problems working or making money.
CH: *Did you have* any *problems? Your life, so far, seems to have been an advertisement for success.*
MB: When I first started out as a choreographer I looked very young—like a kid of 15. And it was difficult to get people to take me seriously. So I grew a beard and after that the problem disappeared. I guess I had so much ambition and drive, I just wouldn't allow anything to stand in the way of my career. It was a pretty neurotic drive, I'll admit, which is healthy in one sense, but, in another, can be pretty sick because it means you never stop driving yourself. Anyway, if I have to be afflicted with a disease, I'd rather be afflicted with something that makes me want to work all the time, rather than sit back doing nothing, except, perhaps, contemplating what I *should* be doing. The only real disappointments I had in my early years were the failures of certain shows of mine. My first Broadway musical as a choreographer—*A Joyful Noise* which I did when I was 23 only ran a week. But I got a Tony Award for it all the same. My second show *Henry Sweet Henry* ran 12 weeks. Then came *Promises Promises* which was my first big hit. But I paid for it by becoming known in the business as a 'disco' choreographer and was only offered shows that had rock scores. To get away from that image I was happy to accept the choreography assignment on *Coco* with Katharine Hepburn. Unfortunately, as a show, *Coco* was a distinct disappointment. The story was boring and the material didn't represent Coco Chanel at all. It was a show dictated by the fact that it was a star vehicle in which everything was built around the leading lady. And that's not my idea of fun. Hepburn was 62 at the time, and not only had she never done a musical before, she had never seen one! So, it was difficult. Also, she's very strong and she loves to fight. So do I. Anyway, we're good friends now. No, the best thing I can say



Opposite and above, the Toronto company rehearse en route to a Drury Lane opening 22 July

about *Coco* is that it helped me do better on *Follies*. I learned from my mistakes, which is what this business is all about. I learned too, that you really have to fight for what you want. Musicals are like wars. It's a long hard battle and you *have* to win if you want to survive in this business. I've seen many young choreographers, whom I thought were talented, get caught up in a show over which they didn't have enough control, and after the show failed, they were never given another chance. And I was determined not to let that happen to me.

CH: *Can you tell me something about your social life? How, for example, do you unwind?*

MB: I have a few close friends whom I see regularly, but that's about it. My social life is very limited. Parties are not my scene. How do I unwind? Well, I smoke a joint sitting in my apartment. I listen to a lot of music—at the moment I'm turned onto Rupert Holmes, whose lyrics are fantastic, and I put on shows for myself in my head. All my 'entertainment' is basically here, in this apartment, in my own environment, where I feel safe. Occasionally I go to a restaurant where I don't have to dress up, but generally I just relax at home in my dungarees and fatigues. Material things don't interest me at all. This apartment of mine, which I regard as a sort of 'prop' is the only material thing I have. And the reason it's decorated in the rather lush style I call Playboy 1968, is to impress gullible producers. They come here, see the subdued, theatrical lighting, and are as impressed as hell by the 'chic' of it all. Automatically, they think to themselves—and I can *see* it happening—this guy *must* have talent to live in such a 'way-out' apartment. Otherwise, a bed, a table, a chair and a record player are all I need.

CH: *How, as a choreographer, do you basically differ from Jerome Robbins and Bob Fosse?*

MB: My basic style isn't like Jerry Robbins's, but I do believe, like Jerry, that the style you impose on a show should be dictated by the subject matter. If you do *Fiddler On The Roof*, obviously there has to be a Jewish flavour to it; and if you do *The King And I*, it has to be Oriental. Fosse, on the other hand, tends to place his own particular stamp on whatever the subject may be, whether it's *Pippin*, or *Charity*, or *Chicago* or the movie of *Cabaret*. There's a very particular Fosse style, and you can always tell a Bob Fosse show. I would like to think you can tell a Michael Bennett show because of the melding of style to content. But I would hate anyone to say: 'Oh, that's typical Bennett choreography'. If you look back at *Coco*, it's nothing like *Promises*, which is nothing like *Company*, which is nothing like *Follies*, which is nothing like *Seesaw*, which is nothing like *A Chorus Line*.

CH: *Apart from* West Side Story, *what other musicals do you regard as the most influential and formative of your career?*

MB: Well, I remember seeing Judy Holliday in *Bells Are Ringing* from the balcony of the Shubert Theatre, where, ironically, *A Chorus Line* is now playing; and I was knocked out by her as well as by Jerry Robbins's choreography. *My Fair Lady* was another watershed musical for me. So was *The Most Happy Fella*.

CH: *What about Oklahoma!*

MB: I never liked *Oklahoma!* much. Not even its score. Its message somehow never got to me. But then I hate Westerns and anything to do with them. I don't go to Western movies, and I never watch them on TV.

CH: *To return to* A Chorus Line. *What do you regard as the most significant achievement of that show.*

MB: What's most important to me about *A Chorus Line* is that the audience, when the show begins, is very happy to sit back and play judge. They see 22 dancers auditioning for a Broadway show, and they know that only eight are going to be chosen. They sit there saying, okay—who would I choose? And then, what happens is that, as the show goes on, they don't want to know any more about judging and who gets chosen. They accept everyone on that stage as individuals, and for what they are. They don't want anyone judged, and, in fact, view the whole process of people sitting in judgement of each other as a terrible thing. And of course, it *is* a terrible thing for people to let their lives be ruled by success. I've learned that and I know. Take my own success. It's wonderful. For the first time people actually know my name. Materially, I can afford anything I want. But it's all so *dangerous*. I'm 33-years-old. There are going to be a lot more shows, and they're not all going to be 'Chorus Lines'. I'm going to have failures, and if I allow my whole life to be geared to what the critics and the public think, I'm going to be in for some heavy-duty painful days. But as long as I do the things I like doing, I think I'll be okay. People should set their own standards and be answerable only to themselves.

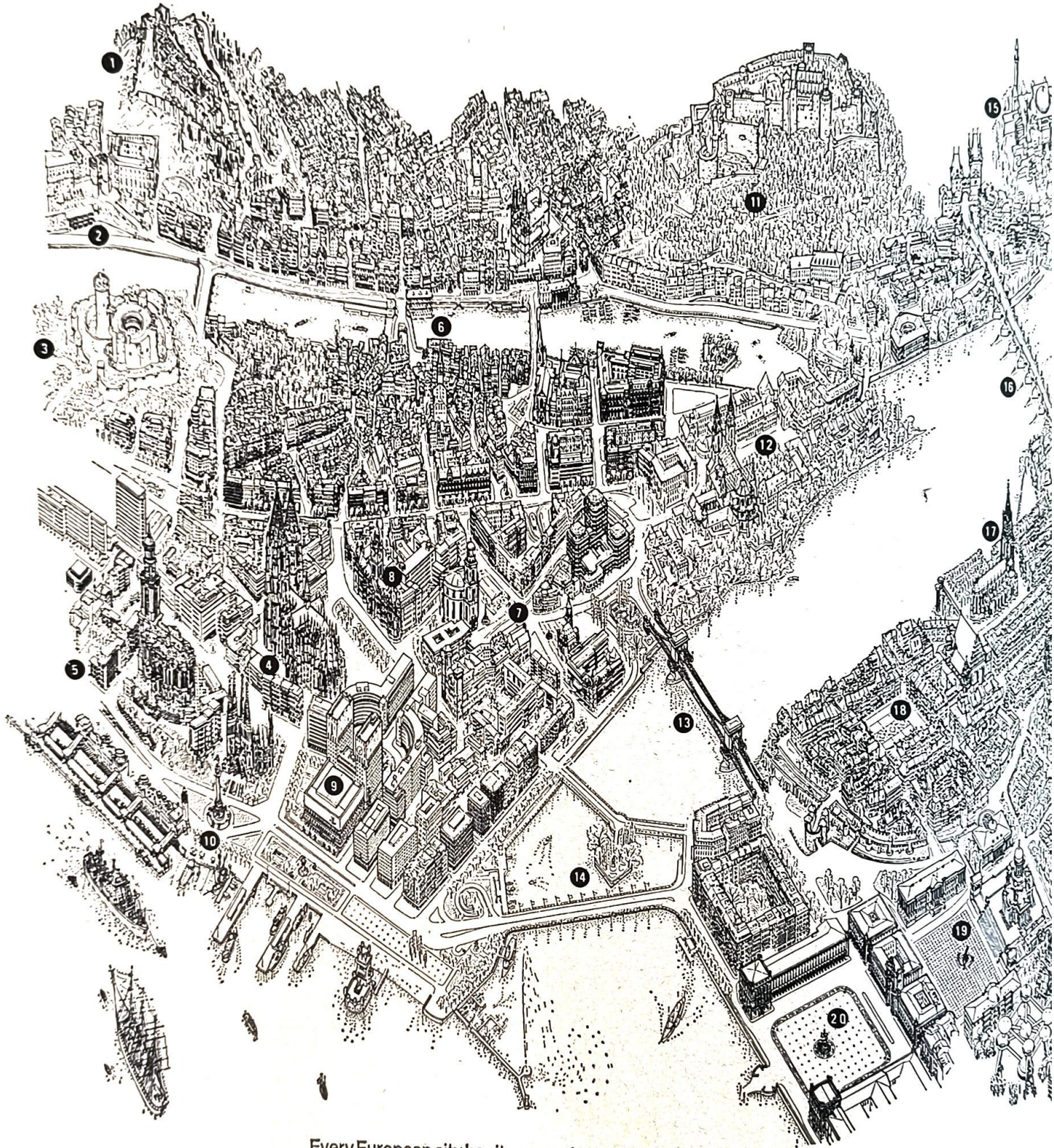
CH: *Which, where the Broadway theatre is concerned, is only possible after you've had a hit like* A Chorus Line.

MB: Well, yes. That, I guess, is the luxury of success. But what I'm talking about is a deeply personal success. You can have a commercial failure and if it's what you *really* wanted to do, it's been, in it's own way, a success. Success is relative. It's just a matter of how you define it. For me, the main thing is not to be crushed by outside pressures. I, personally, have no intention of chasing *A Chorus Line* for the rest of my life. I've done it, and it's now onto something else. I've seen too many people who've had a terrific success not do anything for the next five years because they're afraid it won't be as good as their last show. And I've watched talent destroyed by this. You *have* to keep talent going. If you stop, you can find yourself in terrible trouble.

CH: *New York is particularly cruel to fallen idols; to people who follow success with failure.*

MB: Yes. The thing to avoid is becoming a victim of your own success, which, of course, is easier said than done. But it *is* possible. The thing is not to worry what the whole world thinks about you, and care only what you think of yourself. Anyway, that's my philosophy and I'm sticking to it.

A city well known for its public



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24.Amsterdam: Westerkerk and Royal Palace. 25.Copenhagen: Stock Exchange and Château Christiansborg. 26.Moscow: Kremlin. 27.Düsseldorf: Thyssen Building and Schauspielhaus. 28.Munich: Frauenkirche and Town Hall. 29.London: Parliament and Tower Bridge. 30.Nice: Promenade des Anglais. 31.Vienna: St. Stephen's Cathedral. 32.Belgrade: Parliament. 33.Bucharest: Athenaeum. 34.Stuttgart: Collegiate Church, Old and New Châteaux. 35.Milan: Cathedral. 36.Madrid: Plaza Mayor. 37.Rome: Colosseum. 38.Marseilles: Notre Dame de la Garde. 39.Zagreb: St. Mark's Cathedral. 40.Athens: Acropolis.

SWISSAIR

Salesman Hickey, Alan Tilvern above centre, arrives amongst the down-and-outs and disaffected of Harry Hope's saloon and overturns the community which includes, above, Richard Simpson as Cecil Lewis, Karl Held as Lieb, Cy Grant as Joe Mott, Larry Hoodekoff as Moran and, below, Paola Dionisotti as Margie, Lynda Marchal as Cora and Patti Love as Pearl

Photographs: Laurence Burns

The Iceman Cometh

DAVID ZANE MAIROWITZ reviews O'Neill's masterpiece

THE ICEMAN COMETH by Eugene O'Neill. Presented by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych Theatre on 18 June 1976. Directed by Howard Davies, designed by Chris Dyer, lighting by David Hersey. *Harry Hope*, NORMAN RODWAY; *Ed Mosher*, HARRY TOWB; *Pat McGloin*, RAYMOND MARLOWE; *Rocky*, BOB HOSKINS; *Chuck*, DAVID DAKER; *Piet Wetjoen*, HAL GALILI; *Cecil Lewis*, RICHARD SIMPSON; *Jimmy Tomorrow*, JOHN WARNER; *Joe Mott*, CY GRANT; *Larry Slade*, PATRICK STEWART; *Hugo Kalmar*, PATRICK GODFREY; *Willie Oban*, GARY BOND; *Don Parritt*, KENNETH CRANHAM; *Pearl*, PATTI LOVE; *Margie*, PAOLA DIONISOTTI; *Cora*, LYNDA MARCHAL; *Hickey*, ALAN TILVERN; *Moran*, LARRY HOODEKOFF; *Lieb*, KARL HELD.

PREDICTABLY, the bi-centennial imperative has thrown up the obvious choices out of one of the western world's most paltry dramatic repertoires. *The Iceman Cometh* is in the cream of this very sparse American crop, a masterpiece despite great structural flaws and a second-rate 'philosophy' carried on slim dialogues of optimism-pessimism, illusion-truth. It is one of the outstanding works of a national spirit that does not concern itself with history or culture and which is steeped in what it considers to be psychological reality.

Memory and nostalgia are among the roots of this this reality, and the programme notes to the current RSC production of the *Iceman* call upon O'Neill to give his version: 'You can only write about life if it is far enough in the past. The present is too much mixed up with superficial values; you can't know which thing is important and which is not.' Howard Davies, one of the most competent, and equally one of the safest among new directors, seems to take this remark as the keynote to his production attitude—thoroughly rooted in familiar prejudices from the dramatic past, moving neither play nor audience one inch out of the psycho-analytical morass.

The *Iceman* is one of the few important American plays to dare a plot with a collective central protagonist. The inmates of Harry Hope's saloon, the down-and-outs and the disaffected, have in common their reliance on the 'pipe-dream', of gaining or regaining their individual niches in the world. What O'Neill does not do, typically, is provide them a *world in common*, so that their griefs never radiate outward from one to the next to create a community with general bonds. Instead there is a cumbersome 'pairing' device, most of the characters locked to a twin—not an alter—ego—but some brother or sister in similar misery. So we get the British and Boer officers hoping to re-live the scenes out of the war which define their life experience; the bent cop and the graft-ridden circus barker; the whore and the barkeep pretending they will marry one day; the pimp-bartender Rocky and his two whores, attempting to romanticise the grim reality of their trade; Harry Hope himself, one-time Tammany politician, and Jimmy Tomorrow, ex-journalist, both ageing beyond recall, neither capable of moving from the cloistered bar into the street. The loners are disillusioned anarchists: Hugo, who has given his eyesight for a movement which has rejected him; and Larry Slade, intelligent, sensitive, nihilistic, living with a myth of desired death he cannot effect—one of O'Neill's greatest creations.

This then is a society of private disasters, sunk together 'at the bottom of the sea' and 'at the bottom of the bottle', clutching at the life-giving lie for supportive air. Their bond, if any, is the mantle of Harry Hope's generosity and the annual booze-up that comes with the anticipated arrival of the salesman Hickey.

Enter two interlopers. The first is Don Parritt who has sold his anarchist mother to the police and now seeks retribution from Larry Slade, a surrogate father who has been the mother's lover. The other is Hickey, claiming to have found 'peace' by the complex route of murdering his wife, eliminating with one bullet her pipe-dream that he will mend his dissolute ways and his own guilt about mistreating her. This peace, based on exposing the dream as fraud, he now comes to 'sell' the others. His is the primal imperialism of the American temperament (albeit 'benevolent' in this case)—the truth that's good enough for me is good enough for you.

The immediate effect is to overturn the community. Despite his generous motives he sows fear and resentment in the group, turning them against one another. And once he has shattered the general equilibrium and brought all to the brink of spiritual death, he subjects them to the long ritual confession obligatory to American drama—in this case a clumsy oratorical sequence saved only by its fascinating content.

After Hickey is removed by the police—his future prescribed by that ultimate American peace-bringer, the Electric Chair—the gang convince themselves he was really mad all along and return to their original state, perhaps more united a team than ever before. Only Parritt is moved to action, via Larry's assent, and carries his guilt with him off a fire escape to the pavement below.

Howard Davies' production follows the traditional timidity of the English stage, making few attempts to overcome textual flaws, playing directly into structural pitfalls. It lumbers and wallows, characters drifting in and out to drone their set attitudes, each a peg in a board with undefined contours. Because we never feel the spine of relations that create the social frame, the actors carry their monologues and monotonies in varying degrees of competence on private tracks. Only Bob Hoskins as Rocky looks completely comfortable with the sense of *place*, and only Patrick Stewart as Larry transcends mere considerations of self and maintains the overview of the entire room (admittedly, this is built into the character, but his unwavering performance provides a clue which the other players fail to pick up). Alan Tilvern, climbing into the role of Hickey at the eleventh hour, simply hasn't the range to grasp both faces of the salesman or to avoid O'Neill's character traps. But a serious misinterpretation is Kenneth Cranham's whining Parritt, lacking the knife-edge hysteria which makes his suicide explicable.

The Iceman Cometh deserves a better deal. What is the value of playing it more or less as it has been played since 1939, clumsiness intact, for better or worse, without expanding its rich, raw material to new uses? What, for instance, might turn Harry Hope's into a *community* rather than a collection of personalities? The same characters in a European setting (eg *The Lower Depths* from which it borrows a basic outline) would likely be shored together against the backdrop of a *described* world beyond the enclosing walls. What does the world look like outside Harry Hope's saloon? For O'Neill this is not a crucial question, although it is always implied. After all, this is a world that has rejected all the characters, dropped them to the bottom of existence, a world they are terrified to enter, a source of supreme dread for most of them. It is the pivot of social antagonisms which, at the very least, inform the psychological reality. Are these irrelevant simply because American drama has chosen to ignore them?

Perhaps this bi-centennial hour is just the time to hint at new possibilities. Rather than merely celebrating the past or paying tribute to 200 years of misadventure, there is an opportunity—however small—to help expand this famous two-dimensional culture, to draw back its limiting curtains to reveal the landscape.

The loudspeaker which provides O'Neill's intentions at the beginning of each act of the RSC production tells us that, in just such a saloon, the playwright learned 'not to sit in judgment on people'. Yet without judgment we have only regret, yearning, no place to go, not because there is no future, but because the present is lost in the restrictive glue of O'Neill's 'past'.

A shockingly original approach to the land-locked American theatre, the provision of time, place, a sense of the *present* could have uplifted the *Iceman* without disturbing its central heart. Instead, here's homage to the same old gut-spilling and 'honesty' which builds a cosy national pride as a shield against history.

The 'splendidly hearty' Madame Arcati, played by Elizabeth Spriggs, with the materialised spirit of Elvira, Maria Aitken, who 'turns out to be a self-centred flirt who acts from the bitchiest of motives'

Blithe Spirit

BLITHE SPIRIT by Noel Coward. Presented by the National Theatre at Lyttelton Theatre on 24 June, 1976. Directed by Harold Pinter, settings by Eileen Diss, costumes by Robin Fraser Paye, lighting by Richard Pilbrow. *Edith,* SUSAN WILLIAMSON; *Ruth,* ROWENA COOPER; *Charles,* RICHARD JOHNSON; *Dr Bradman,* GEOFFREY CHATER; *Mrs Bradman,* JOAN HICKSON; *Madame Arcati,* ELIZABETH SPRIGGS; Elvira, MARIA AITKEN.

SANDY WILSON

'THE PRIMARY and dominant function of the theatre is to amuse people, not to reform or edify them.' So said Noël Coward in 1931, and there is no reason to suppose that he had changed his mind ten years later when he retired to Portmeirion and wrote *Blithe Spirit* in five days. The play opened in London in the summer of 1941, when the Blitz was at its height, and ran through the rest of the war, providing a very welcome diversion from what was going on in the real world. Present-day commentators may find it to be a statement on the Nature of Mortality, made at a time when death was very close to most of us, or discover in it proof of a deep-seated misogyny (which they like to equate with homosexuality). To me such analyses are piffle, and the only object of reviving *Blithe Spirit,* whether at the National or on Shaftesbury Avenue, is to entertain the audiences, and this the present production largely succeeds in doing. I would be lying if I said I enjoyed it just as much this time around; I saw it twice during the original run, once when Coward took over the part of Charles Condomine from Cecil Parker, and I knew the play so well that while stationed in Iraq in 1945 I tried to arrange a reading, in which I intended to give a perfect imitation of Margaret Rutherford. Luckily it never took place. But I can still hear the first West End cast speaking most of the lines, and at the time the whole thing did seem to me to be perfection.

What is interesting to me, however, about the new production at the Lyttelton is the direction by Harold Pinter. As you can tell, I thought I was pretty familiar with *Blithe Spirit,* but Mr Pinter gave me a whole new angle on it: in his interpretation—and, considering his own plays, this should not come as a surprise—it is not so much about disembodied spirits cavorting round their former haunts as about human relationships or, rather, the failure of humans to relate to each other. As the play unfolds—and this production does tend to 'unfold', the running time on the first night being a good three hours— one realises that Charles Condomine, the author of obviously second-rate thrillers, and both his wives—the live one, Ruth, and the dead one, Elvira—are themselves pretty second-rate people. Charles and Ruth start off by patronising and ridiculing the half-witted maid, Edith (a delicious performance by Susan Williamson, correct in every detail, down to the amount of slip she shows) who, one is glad to discover, gets her own back on them, and go on to exploit and make fun of Madame Arcati—the only decent person in the play—with the aid of Dr and Mrs Bradman, who are themselves fairly worthless representatives of the human race. Elvira, when she materialises, turns out to be a self-centred flirt who acts from the bitchiest of motives, and one is hardly surprised when Charles—no great catch himself—loudly complains of being 'hag-ridden' all his life and, at the play's end, is delighted to be shot of both his wives. I'm not sure that it's what Coward intended, but it certainly shows a new facet of the play; the only trouble is that by concentrating on the marital infelicities of the Condomines it does rather leave the other principal, poor Madame Arcati, out in the cold.

I say this because I find it difficult to explain why the performance of Miss Elizabeth Spriggs in the part, good as it is, does not quite work. I think perhaps she is too young and, despite what I take to be padding, not quite big enough, in both senses. The joy of Madame Arcati is that we are led to expect a conventional medium—bizarre, witch-like and 'spiritual'—but what

turns up is a splendidly hearty old girl who has pedalled all the way on her 'bike', has a taste for dry martinis and can't wait to get home to her Ovaltine. By writing her this way Coward delivered a typical 'Master'-stroke and turned what would have been just an ingenious farce about ghosts into a thoroughly durable comedy. Perhaps Miss Spriggs will grow into the part and assert herself more over Pinter's conception, but I suggest she asks for a change of wardrobe: her beads, brocades and artificial flowers are quite wrong, though the tweed skirt is on the right lines, as is her second act hat.

Mr Richard Johnson, on the other hand, brings, in this version of the play, rather more to the part of Charles than I thought was there and when Elvira refers contemptuously to his 'seedy grandeur' I realised that this was, though unlikely on the face of it, an inspired piece of casting. He has the sort of crumpled good looks one associates with best-selling authors who play golf a lot and womanise on the Riviera and one rather hopes that his third marriage will be even more incompatible. As it is, he has in Miss Rowena Cooper's Ruth the sort of bossy, haute-bourgeoise partner he deserves and, thanks to Mr Pinter, one does not have to guess at the smug self-satisfaction of their life together in what appears to be a gigantic monumental rotunda set down in the Kentish marshes. (Eileen Diss's set, I should point out, which struck me as more suitable for the heroics of Racine than the drawing-room intimacies of Coward, is designed for the stage of the Olivier Theatre.)

For some reason, although the period is clearly pre-war, both Miss Cooper and Joan Hickson are dressed firmly in the sub-Norman Hartnell style of the early 40s, and one half expects to hear the bombardment of Dover in the distance or see Madame Arcati make an entrance in a tin hat. But Maria Aitken appears utterly bewitching as the ghost of Elvira and almost made me forget Kay Hammond. She has a look of Penelope Dudley Ward, who also played the part at one time, but is very much herself and, especially in the scene where she tells Charles what she really thinks of him, was as long, dry and sparkling as the Tom Collins I drank after the show, on what I am sure must have been the hottest first night since *Blithe Spirit* first opened.

Richard Johnson, who captures well the 'seedy grandeur' of Charles, husband to Rowena Cooper's bossy, haute-bourgeoise Ruth, below, and to the ghost of his first wife Elvira

Photographs: John Haynes

Natasha (June Ritchie) stands behind the three sisters Irena (Angela Down), Olga (Susan Engel) and Masha (Janet Suzman). Below, Vershinin (Nigel Davenport) with Masha

Photographs: Sophie Baker

THREE SISTERS

THREE SISTERS by Anton Chekhov, translated by Elisaveta Fen. Presented by Duncan C Weldon and Louis I Michaels for Triumph Theatre (Productions) Ltd and the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford, at the Cambridge Theatre on 23 June 1976. Directed by Jonathan Miller, designed by Patrick Robertson, costumes by Rosemary Vercoe, lighting by Nick Chelton.

Andrey, JOHN SHRAPNEL; *Natasha*, JUNE RITCHIE; *Olga*, SUSAN ENGEL; *Masha*, JANET SUZMAN; *Irena*, ANGELA DOWN; *Koolyghin*, ANTONY BROWN; *Vershinin*, NIGEL DAVENPORT; *Toozenbach*, PETER EYRE; *Soliony*, PETER BAYLISS; *Chebutykin*, SEBASTIAN SHAW; *Fedotik*, GEOFFREY COLLINS; *Rode*, MIKE HAYWARD; *Ferapont*, TONY JAY; *Anfisa*, JEAN TAYLOR-SMITH; *Soldiers, servants, etc*, PENELOPE HARRIS, ROB ENGLISH, IAN GODFREY, ROGER RICHARDSON.

MICHAEL COVENEY

WHEN Vershinin arrives in the country town to take charge of the battery stationed there, he wastes no time in calling on the three sisters. Nigel Davenport's entrance in Act 1 is a model of civilised suavity. He has no trouble at all in identifying which sister is which, although he has not seen the family for many years. Complimenting the household on the amenability of the town, he contradicts Olga's assertion that the climate is 'cold' by commenting on its healthiness, its 'Russian-ness'. And, in the same speech he adds: 'But there's one rather strange thing, the station is fifteen miles from the town. And no one knows why.' That's one side of Vershinin; the other is the percipient amateur philosopher who knows that happiness is a delusion that exists most forcefully among those whose notions of it are vaguest.

I jump in on this tack because it seems to me that Jonathan Miller's brilliant, lucid production of this play is the best Chekhovian piece of work the English theatre has thrown up for years. Miller's ability to anatomise the way in which people *actually* behave under stress has distinguished all his best work in the theatre: *King Lear* with Michael Hordern at Nottingham, the trilogy of *Ghosts, The Seagull* and *Hamlet* at Greenwich two years ago and, also at Greenwich, subsequent to a seemingly unimproveable version for the National Theatre's old Theatre Mobile unit, *Measure for Measure*. From the first minute of *Three Sisters* at the Cambridge the tone is set: Angela Down's hard-edged Irena looks at us sternly from the front of the stage, forming an ironically passive denial of Olga's desperate 'your face is positively radiant'. Janet Suzman's Masha lounges irritably and irritatedly on the *chaise longue*, half reading her book, half making her presence felt by fiddling with her hair and whistling through her teeth.

Olga (Susan Engel) sits down to play the piano but is shooed away from it by the incoming Toozenbach, who plays a good deal better than does Olga, a detail that both introduces the Baron as a tactless guest and isolates Olga still further from any position of authority in the room. Miss Engel does not play her as a whining, prim defeatist but, much more interestingly, as a genuinely concerned mother figure hanging on by her fingernails to a position of usefulness. The stronger they are, the harder they fall, and the extraordinary power of the final scenes is generated principally by the disintegration of Miss Down's 19th century New Woman into a stoical siphon for the evaporation of all dreams of getting to Moscow. Not that Moscow, you feel, would have been the answer anyway. The death of Toozenbach hits Irena like a bolt from the sky not because she has suddenly decided she loves him, but because the incident contains a fateful message that she has been wrong about *everything* all along and must atone for her wrongheadedness by consigning herself to more scenes of country oblivion. Irena's dislocated paranoia about making herself useful through 'work' amounts to a form of *hubris* and her stunned realisation of this carries, in Miss Down's superlative performance, full tragic clout.

The characters, one by one, beat against their predicaments like moths stunning themselves on a closed window while foolishly trying to get near the light. Even the decrepit doctor Chebutykin (Sebastian Shaw) who watches the others come and go with world-weary disinterest ('Let them cry for a bit. . . . What does it matter? Nothing matters!') is allowed by his director an alarming elaboration on his Act 3 outburst of nihilism: the cry to put an end to it all is accompanied by an attempt to

drown himself not just in his own sorrows *but also in the bedroom basin*. This is the sort of startling visual direction that could only work in a production where what people are saying corresponds very accurately to how they are feeling and how that feeling is expressed in physical action. In the same scene, the newest member of the family, Andrey's wife Natasha (if you don't count her child), breezes proprietorially through the room to issue a chillingly barbaric broadside to the old housekeeper and is then hilariously mimicked by Irena with that devastating resentment always reserved by the bourgeois for those who encroach unsubtly on preserves not theirs by right of birth.

This quality of observation pays particular dividends, too, in the playing of Andrey by John Shrapnel. The three stages of his relationship with Natasha (June Ritchie is beautifully cast) are perfectly indicated: first, he is the nervous, shuffling younger brother who finds Natasha's brazen style both amusing and sexually attractive—he flees passionately to her from the demure claustrophobia of his sisters' company; next, at the beginning of Act 2, he is the defeated, bullied husband fencing off his wife's clock-watching gossip as distractedly as he does the absurd remarks of the old retainer Ferapont; and thirdly, at the end, he articulates his overpowering sense of personal waste while Ferapont stands deafly by, playing mute chorus to his master's stream of helpless rage. Mr Shrapnel's playing, never 'lyrical' or self-indulgent, burns up the stage with sulphurous intensity. While Andrey explodes, Ferapont, given a wickedly, cadaverously rigid presence by Tony Jay, talks about the death of two thousand people in Petersburg in a voice that seems to rise from his bowels and obliterate all physiognomical expression on the way out.

The company is strong right the way through. Janet Suzman's Masha is a riveting study in gloomy, fidgety depressiveness that breaks memorably open while bidding goodbye to Vershinin. Her howl on 'My life is messed up, my thoughts are mixed up' is not a theatrical response to a melodramatic situation, but a failed attempt at stemming the floodgates as things finally and irreversibly fall apart. Chekhov's dramatic mastery at turning the screw has the dog-like Koolyghin (Antony Brown) appear at this of all moments to ignore what he sees to be palpably happening and cover it with some feeble drivel about a false beard he has confiscated at the school. Mr Brown, too, is well cast and gives the most heart-rendingly accurate stage account of mediocrity in action that I have ever seen. Excellent work, too, from Peter Eyre as a spring-heeled, grinning Toozenbach, and from Peter Bayliss as a slobbering, pathetic Soliony, brought to heel by Irena in no uncertain manner as she disguestedly rejects his boozy proposal. Not the least of Soliony's mistakes, you feel, is that he dares to enunciate the one fantasy that keeps him going.

Patrick Robertson's simple, non-specific design, Rosemary Vercoe's costumes and Nick Chelton's lighting all play their parts in completing a production that, for sheer intelligence and expertise of execution, knocks everything else in London sideways.

Angela Down's 'hard-edged' Irena with her present of a silver samovar. Below, John Sharpnel's Andrey who 'burns up the stage with sulphurous intensity' watched by Vershinin, far left, Olga, the doctor Chebutykin (Sebastian Shaw) and Masha in Jonathan Miller's 'brilliant, lucid production' of Three Sisters

Photographs: Vijay and Sophie Baker

The Engineers of the Imagination, pitching a tent in the Buckinghamshire countryside, often seem to be 'the last repositories of mystery in a technological society'
Photographs: Roger Perry

The Island of the Lost World

TONY COULT reviews Welfare State's visit to a new housing city

WE SAT, about twenty of us, on benches along three sides of a square tent, open to the sky, its walls made of drum-tight creamy calico. The performing area before us was blue and bore two small iron braziers, spluttering like altar offerings, sat on piles of blue stone chips. *The Island of the Lost World—A Sideshow Experience,* the latest touring show by Welfare State, was about to begin.

The Engineers of the Imagination had brought their caravans to Milton Keynes, the new housing city being torn from the Buckinghamshire countryside. Milton Keynes is still only half-built. It's a place of incipient, but as yet unachieved, neatness. In all that carefully landscaped rurality, weeds grow, a few older buildings survive, the postman still cycles down the dual carriage-way on an old pushbike. A city with no history except that of the fields it is digging into was where Welfare State had come to tell their stories of old and ancient things.

The 'sideshow experience' was a large trailer set up on a grass verge by the village green of Woughton, still preserved amongst the liquorice all-sort varieties of building all around. The trailer was decorated with a smoky industrial panorama sandwiched between a relief sculpture of a flying saucer above and a long painted dinosaur skeleton below. Inside the trailer you peer at strange tableaux set up inside display cases. The displays relate to a story, told in photographs, about the appearance in the countryside of a huge Iron Egg. That image itself tells you something about the imaginative function of Welfare State. Iron is a prevailing element in their work, iron that is worked by human hands, rusted, rejected and then re-used, re-worked. Their iron-work looks as if it comes from those odd corners of industrial wasteland, half covered in weed, you see from the train on the fringes of most towns and cities. Often they seem to be the last repositories of mystery in technological societies. So the Iron Egg is an image that tells you about natural things like birth, and about man-made things like worked iron, and mixes the two to suggest thoughts and feelings about the collective unconscious of technological society.

In the cream tent we watched stories acted out which were also about demons and spirits from the unconscious. Welfare State now seem to be scaling their work to a more intimate level, producing something more like a conventional play. But the plots are bone-simple. Two grossly-costumed spirits perform a ritualistic battle, one in the tattered remains of a silvery asbestos fire-fighting suit, the other thin, birdlike, menacingly gleeful, with large lumps of fungus for a beard. After their struggle, they go off and a new story is acted. The old props are cleared and new ones set by a blue-hooded figure in a blue-striped costume who might be an executioner, or a butcher. The pattern repeats itself. Overhead, swifts were wheeling in the evening sky, traffic

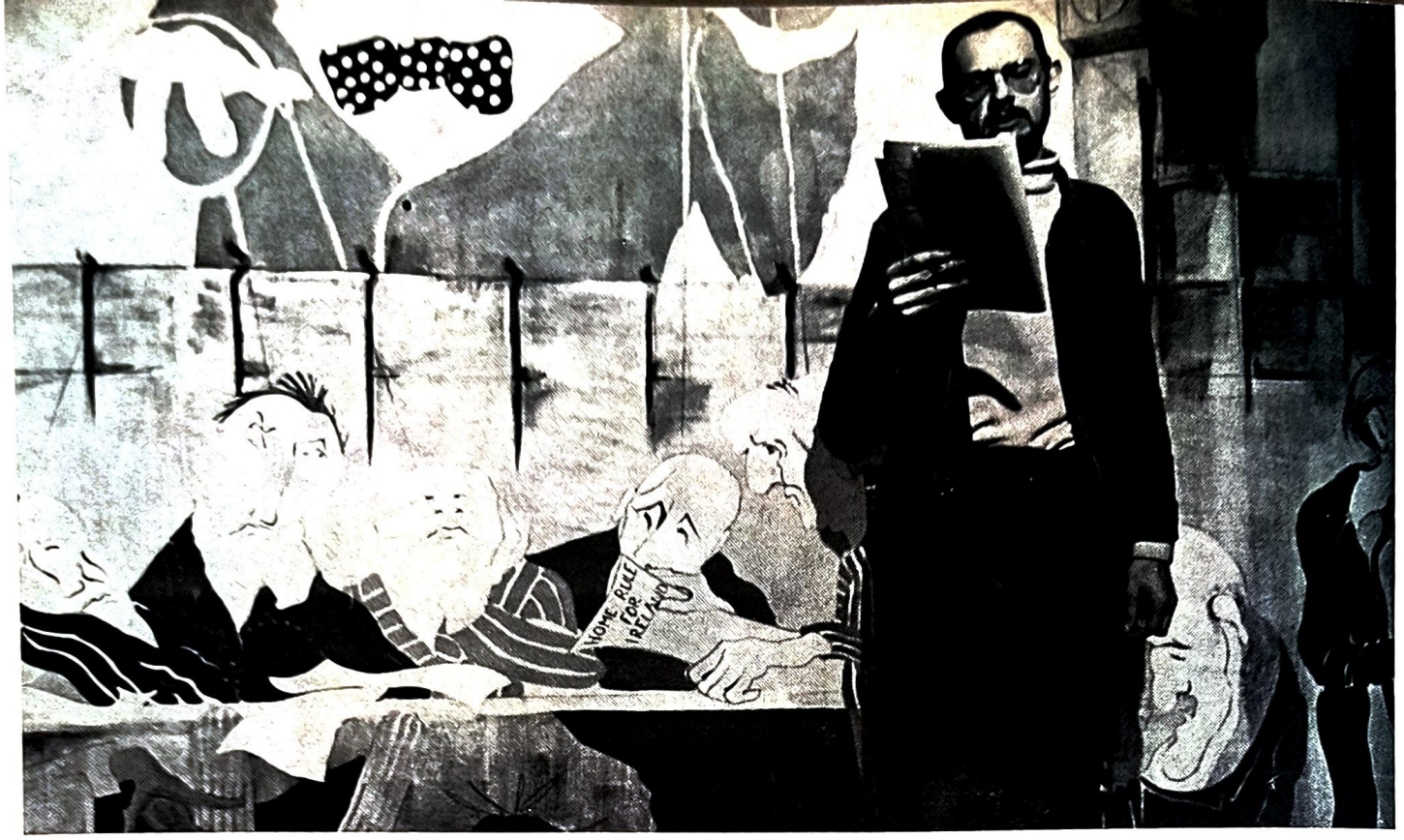
'Welfare State now seem to be scaling their work to a more intimate level, producing something more like a conventional play'

burbling along the new roads all around, and over all, a bright half moon hung. No less part of the performance than the actors or the excellent music, these chance effects were simply part of the theatrical resources available to companies who work out of doors or in non-specialised performance areas.

Two stories in particular seemed to bear a special, again chance relationship, to this city in the fields. In one, a tall red-faced figure enters with staring eyes to find a toy wooden boat on which are mounted three figures made of felt and rusted wire, travellers in monk-like clothing on some journey of pilgrimage. The red-faced figure, his close-cropped head towering fearfully over the boat, sings a rough guttural song. He is the King of the Ditches. He glares angrily at the Pilgrims who sail on oblivious, without movement. He pulls the boat here and there. He lifts it up as if in a storm he prods the pilgrims with a knife, pulls one up and dashes him to the ground. He drowns another with a jug of water and sets the third on a furnace where the felt burns for several minutes. Then this cruel atavistic King turns to the audience. 'Where are *you* going, Pilgrims?' he demands. The actor playing the King speaks in a guttural Low Countries accent, turning Pilgrims into the demeaning diminutive 'Pargwimps'. If you tear up the earth, go where you've no right, disturb the balance of things, you may reap disaster. That's a thought for all those young men with their primed Rapidographs and sheets of Letraset.

If that story is a warning, then the couple who wheel a cart with old tin sheets on to the performance area offer a picture of a sort of peace. The plot is bare. The man and wife arrive, build a house, light a fire in the hearth, decide to move on, and leave. It is their activity that is beautiful to watch. The cart and the tin sheets (decaying old Gas Board stuff) are somehow constructed into a makeshift shelter just big enough for the wife to sit in and light a fire under the chimney. Both people look like characters out of a Breughel painting reworked by Gerald Scarfe. The wife for instance is all bags. Her dress is hung around with bags, which might be her breasts or might be bags. When she dances to her husband's thumping accordion, the bags fly out in a great circle around her. When they take down the house, they turn it into a boat and go out, the husband playing his accordion, the wife pulling the boat. The thumping quality of his playing seemed to be the music of the Breughel wedding feast, a sort of sensuous Dutch rotundity to its rhythm. In such a simple story, the wife's decision to move on assumes pivotal importance. As they move off to the music, they have celebrated Mobility and Choice, two ideas which sit oddly amongst the rows and outcrops of housing all around. The rough tin of their house seems pregnant with possibilities compared to the computer-designed variety of the rest of the city.

All this burrowing into the subconscious, like prodding the bed of an old pond, stirs up energy, and Welfare State had a simple but effective way to take it up. As we emerged onto the grass verge, the husband-actor was standing on a hummock of grass playing bagpipes, not skirling like a Scotsman, but more heavily, like the accordion, a distinctly European beat. By his side in the rich dusk was a small boy in a costume of odds and ends suggesting a pageboy. He held a thick burning candle in a wooden holder. It was simple and very beautiful, those two benevolent spirits who had sprung from the churned soil to play for us. They were now joined by other members of the company playing a saxophone, washboard, cymbals and drums. They struck up a walking tune and headed off down the road with the rest of us strolling happily behind. We went over the canal bridge and across the village green. For a moment a pulse in the half-alive city seemed to beat. We finished up at a pub, had a drink and went home.



Questions of history

DAVE ROBINS reviews new work by Patrick Galvin, John McGrath, Margaretta D'Arcy and John Arden

OUTSIDE the Young Vic, the Workers Association for the democratic settlement of the Northern Ireland Question were handing out leaflets claiming that what we were about to witness was a white-wash of the IRA. Inside the theatre: sound effects of bombs, bazookas and machine guns, and actors dressed as soldiers keeping an eye on the audience.

This was London's chance to see Patrick Galvin's *We Do It For Love,* performed by the Lyric Players from Belfast under the direction of Mary O'Malley. *We Do It For Love* is a play with songs about a split and turbulent society. The text is centred on the sad adventures of a middle-aged Irish Hamlet (Louis Rolston), who runs a mythical merry-go-round; a merry go-round of death and savagery where the people are strapped to the horses and can't get off.

The production strings together haunting images of the Troubles. A little girl sucks a lollipop with a look that says she has seen it all. A young squaddie clutches his rifle nervously on some shadowy street corner. A priest rages in his pulpit. 'They tell us this is a war of liberation. Liberation from what? And who in Christ's name is being liberated?' Death is a common theme. The Troubles mean happy days only for the undertaker (Mark Mulholland) as he drapes his coffins alternately in Union Jacks and Tricolors. 'Some of my best friends are in coffins', he sighs. Such black humour is typical of *We Do It For Love.* Yet it never descends to morbidity or defeatism. The writer's open approach conveys equally the determination of the IRA and the anger of Protestant workers. And there are moments of positive hope: men from both sides interned in Long Kesh. 'We've got to get together sometime'. The words of one ensemble song go, 'this grim disorder called law and order will soon give way to the rights of man'.

A recurring scene is of two housewives (Leila Webster and Catherine Gibson), one Catholic, the other Protestant, cursing each other in their respective vernaculars as they sit knitting and mourning their lost ones. In a romantic interlude they spend a joyous drunken evening, brought together by an open-minded young housewife (Stella McCusker). At the end, the company symbolically burn all the paraphernalia of sectarian violence. 'Troubles away', they sing, Catholic and Protestant workers must unite, and the first step towards this should be the withdrawal of British troops.

We Do It For Love is not a major departure in modern theatre. Nor does it present a radically new political analysis. Nevertheless, it is a heartening and illuminating experience for English audiences. We are left with a picture of a proud and courageous people, who, despite their terrifying differences, must one day be left to settle their own affairs. Otherwise the Irish Question will remain what it has been for so long—a question without answers.

While the shadow of the gunman hangs over the prospects for progress in Galvin's Belfast, the shadow of Scottish Nationalism threatens playwright John McGrath's dream of a socialist society in Britain. With *Little Red Hen* (brought to London at the Shaw Theatre), McGrath and his Scottish 7:84 Company set out to combat the political illusions and false promises of the Scots Nats—promises that threaten to win young militants from more traditional allegiances.

McGrath's central protagonists are a kilted lassie, eyes bright with separatist fervour, and her aged but spirited granny, a veteran of the struggles of the 'Red Clyde' of Glasgow in the 'twenties. To win the girl back to the socialist fold, granny takes her, and the audience, down the socialist theatre's version of memory lane. There follows a spate of revivalism and political nostalgia of which Jimmy Carter would be proud. John Maclean, Jimmy Maxton, Willie Gallacher. These faded, albeit exemplary,

orators—leaders of Scottish socialism in the 'twenties—are rescued by the author from the dustbins of Labour history and literally put up on plinths. One by one they are unveiled before us by the old red hen, to deliver their socialist sermons afresh.

In *We Do It For Love*, Padraig Pearse, founder of the Republican army, is similarly unveiled. 'Ireland unfree shall never be at peace' he pronounces in rolling Yeatsian tones. But this human statue is an ambiguous figure, as all our heroes must surely be. Part redeemer, part macabre waxwork from Ireland's chamber of past horrors. No such note of Brechtian irony is heard in *Little Red Hen*. Instead, history is a one-dimensional cartoon strip with the fighting Scottish working class being sold out by Labour Party promises of change coming through Parliament. And, of course, there is the obligatory socialist theatre routine of stunned militants hearing the news of the Great Betrayal of the General Strike of 1926.

The radical edge to 7:84's talents are better used when they turn their attention to today's Scots Nats MP's, aptly renamed 'The Bay City Rollers of Westminster', with all their gimmickry and middle class prejudices. Another fruitful target is the corrupt Poulson world of Glasgow Corporation. There's a self-made builder who makes a fortune from post-War redevelopments then joins the Labour Party and becomes a councillor. 'My brother got a bullet in Spain (in the 'thirties). I've got a villa.' The play's conclusion is predictable. Granny's revivalist tactics win out, and the Scots Nats lass converts to a little red hen. A perfunctory sketch follows, showing a modern working class family better off than their predecessors but paralysed in front of the tele. How to re-mobilise them towards 'the dictatorship of the proletariat and the seizure of state power . . .?'

How disappointing that such a talented group of writers, actors and musicians as 7:84 should be satisfied with merely mouthing the megalomaniac dreams of the left sects, exhortations to a revolutionary knees-up. For it is clearly within their power to convey in a compelling and entertaining manner the real predicaments of working people.

Back to Ireland, and Margaretta D'Arcy and John Arden's marathon *Non-Stop Connolly Cycle*. This examines the life of James Connolly, the legendary Irish socialist leader martyred by the British after the abortive Dublin Rising of Easter 1916. The show has developed from the work that D'Arcy/Arden have been doing in Galway, where they help to run a theatre workshop for new forms of Irish drama. The fourteen episodes (fifty minutes each on consecutive lunchtimes) were presented at the Almost Free as a series of dramatised readings with live music and song. That's eleven hours and forty minutes of non-stop Irish history. I found it hard work getting through five episodes, let alone fourteen. (They shoot horses, don't they.)

D'Arcy/Arden justify its great length as arising from 'the need to disentangle the many complex threads of social and political history involved in the Connolly story.' They hope that the show 'will both clarify and explain many aspects of the Irish problem which at present mystify British audiences'. Connolly's ghost is made flesh by the Ardens' considerable poetic gifts. Many of his speeches are elegies of driving lyricism. Yet the message is never quite clear. The interminable, internecine squabbles between nineteenth century Republicans, nationalists, socialists *et al*, are dealt with in obsessive detail. These debates are hard to understand at the best of times—rendered in heroic couplets they're impenetrable. There is a certain indulgence in writing a five-billion word epic, and that the subject should be the agony of Irish history adds an extra irony. As a character in *We Do It For Love*, remarks, 'a long history of rebellions, the Irish. Then always the betrayal, the big mouth'. It cannot be that more words are needed to 'save old Ireland'.

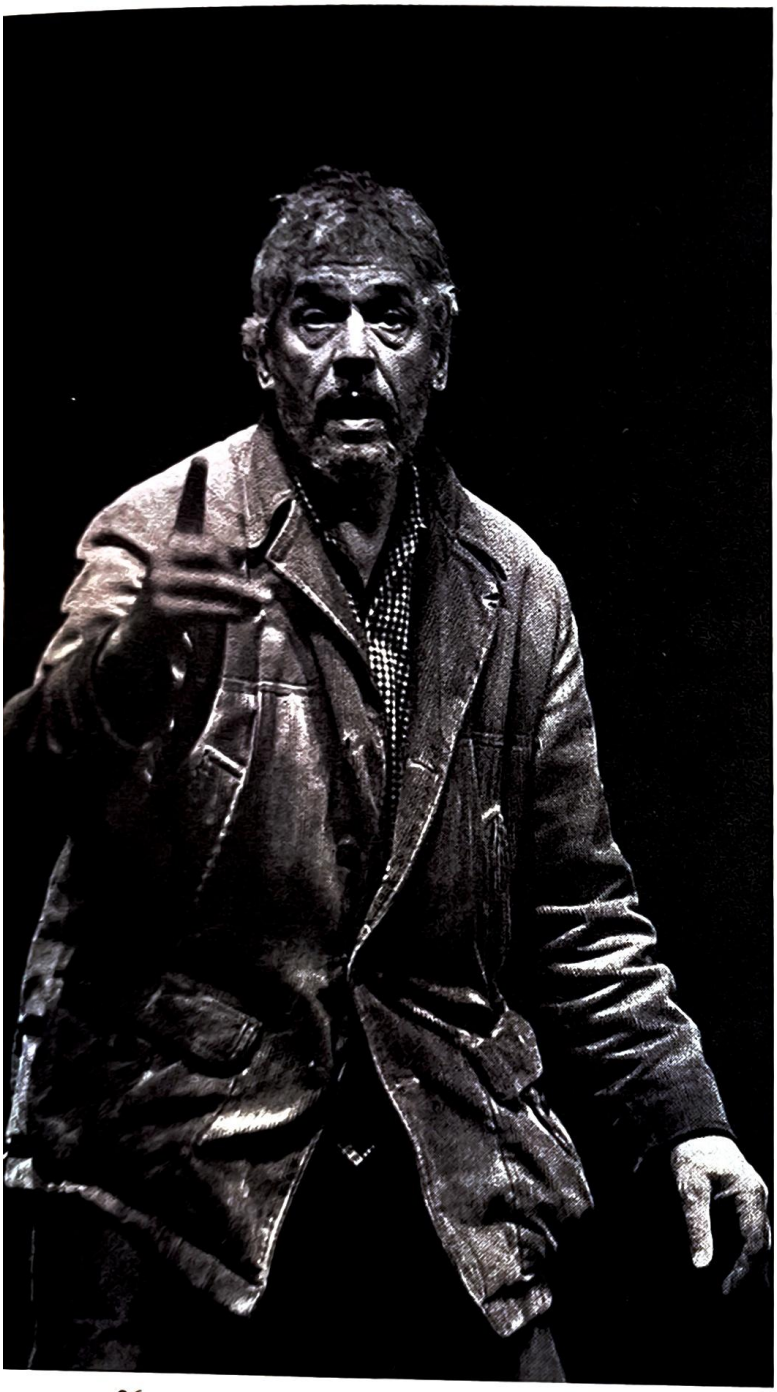
More seriously, I detected a superior 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do' tone in the portrayal of Connolly. A social prophet whose message was bound to be misunderstood by mere mortal humans? But does Ireland need more revivals of saviours and martyrs? James Connolly is dead. Radical socialists should be the last people to believe in resurrections of movements and leaders. 'What this country needs is a future instead of a past', exclaims the old man in *We Do It For Love*. Socialist dramatists could do worse than to pin this message from a contemporary Irish play over their writing desks.

Scene from Non-stop Connolly Cycle, *opposite, a marathon study of James Connolly, the legendary Irish socialist martyred by the British after the Dublin Rising of Easter 1916. Above, the central protagonists in John McGrath's* Little Red Hen *which portrays the shadow of Scottish Nationalism threatening the dream of a socialist society. Virginia Stark plays Young Hen, and Elizabeth McLennan plays Old Hen*

Photographs: Tim Hutcheson and Barry Jones

One play down

NED CHAILLET reviews Athol Fugard's Dimetos, which first appeared at last year's Edinburgh Festival and survived surgery but only for one month in London



DIMETOS by Athol Fugard. Presented by Oscar Lewenstein and Eddie Kulukundis by arrangement with Nottingham Playhouse at the Comedy Theatre on May 24, 1976 (closed June 19, 1976). Directed by Athol Fugard, designed by Douglas Heap, lighting by Brian Thomas.
Lydia, CELIA QUICKE; *Dimetos*, PAUL SCOFIELD; *Sophia*, YVONNE BRYCELAND; *Danilo*, BEN KINGSLEY.

ATHOL FUGARD'S *Dimetos* made its first ill-fated appearance at the 1975 Edinburgh Festival, where the combination of poor acoustics, thick South African accents and the unexpected non-political nature of the play worked together to bring about general disappointment and denouncement. I saw the play on its third night there, by which time the acoustic problem had been largely resolved, the accents somewhat tamed and the *Sizwe Bansi* expectations removed. It was a haunting performance, and though I found fault with the studied ambiguities of place and time and with the extraordinarily convoluted resolution based on geometry, no other play I saw in the past year has so intrigued me. It seemed to me a theatrical equivalent of the so-called 'island' films of Ingmar Bergman, nearly as austere and intense as *Hour of the Wolf* or *The Passion*, but with its power in its language and simple, compelling stage pictures.

Against general opinion I retained great expectations of a London production, particularly as Fugard was said to be massively revising the script, and because Paul Scofield was taking the part of Dimetos and I thought his intelligence would sort out the meaning of the final speech and convey it in performance. This personal faith in the play, however, meant that, far from my original vague anticipations, my reactions were bound to be weighted with high expectations. Even so, what I saw in London seems far from what I remembered seeing in Edinburgh and suggested only occasionally the mystery and majesty that I felt there. Far from solving the problems of his vague environment, Fugard's new production seemed determined to point them up, emphasising even more carefully the non-specific location and universal intentions of the piece.

Dimetos seems, at first, to be far removed from the hard political clarity of Fugard's earlier plays concerned with apartheid. It is set in a 'remote province' and based on an obscure myth which Fugard found mentioned in the notebooks of Albert Camus. The Dimetos of the myth had a 'guilty love' for his niece, who hanged herself; so indeed does Fugard's Dimetos have a guilty love for his niece, who also hangs herself. The stage Dimetos, an engineer who has fled from the city to the country, becomes aware of his passion when his niece removes her dress to clamber down a well and help him rescue a horse. When an emissary from the city comes to try to lure Dimetos back, Dimetos uses the unwitting man to help arrange the near-rape of his niece. It is the niece's discovery that her uncle watched the assault from a lemon grove that leads her to kill herself, and, quite some time later, the emissary, Danilo, returns and accuses Dimetos in the all-too literal words of Camus, of having had a 'guilty love'.

In the myth, some time after the hanging, the body of a beautiful woman is washed ashore and Dimetos, finding the body, falls in love and goes mad as he watches it decay. In the play, Dimetos has fled with his housekeeper to a remote beach where a sea-

creature one day crawls upon an off-shore rock, dies and decays. Dimetos, the engineer who fled the city, now reduced to collecting shells for trading, gradually lets the smell of putrefaction drive him mad, and his geometrically ordered universe shatters. In order that the collapse of his universe might be understood, much of the first act is given to demonstrating engineering principles, with Dimetos propounding gravity as a law (the word is crucial) that holds the universe together, or demonstrating knots or a system of pulleys.

Douglas Heap's set reinforces the vagueness of place; with only one scene change between acts his designs are simple suggestions using the same elements as in Edinburgh: a wooden platform, a bench, some ropes. This design permits Fugard to stage the piece with a too fluid economy, eliding scenes which should perhaps be drawn apart. Though the device may save time and contribute to an apparent unity, it produces no dramatic collisions; it does make all the more apparent the disparities between the achievements of the various performers.

The staging also hides the structural weaknesses of most of the first act. It has been said that the play is too neatly a dramatisation of Camus's paragraph. I suggest that on the contrary it is too energetically concerned with all the possible implications and motivations of the simple events outlined. Most of the first act is fleshy exposition which elaborates Dimetos's history while coyly hiding the logical occurrence of place names with inexplicit phrases such as 'our bustling little metropolis'.

It seems to me that the action begins more than halfway through the play, virtually at the point where the heat of the solstice, drink and proximity bring Danilo to attempt his assault on the niece. Little of the detailed dramatic justifications carefully built into the story are necessary from that point on. To be sure, it is necessary to establish that physical laws have ordered Dimetos's existence, it is useful to know that Dimetos taught his niece the knot she used to hang herself with, but little more of the dialogue in the first hour prepares one for the claustrophobic last act.

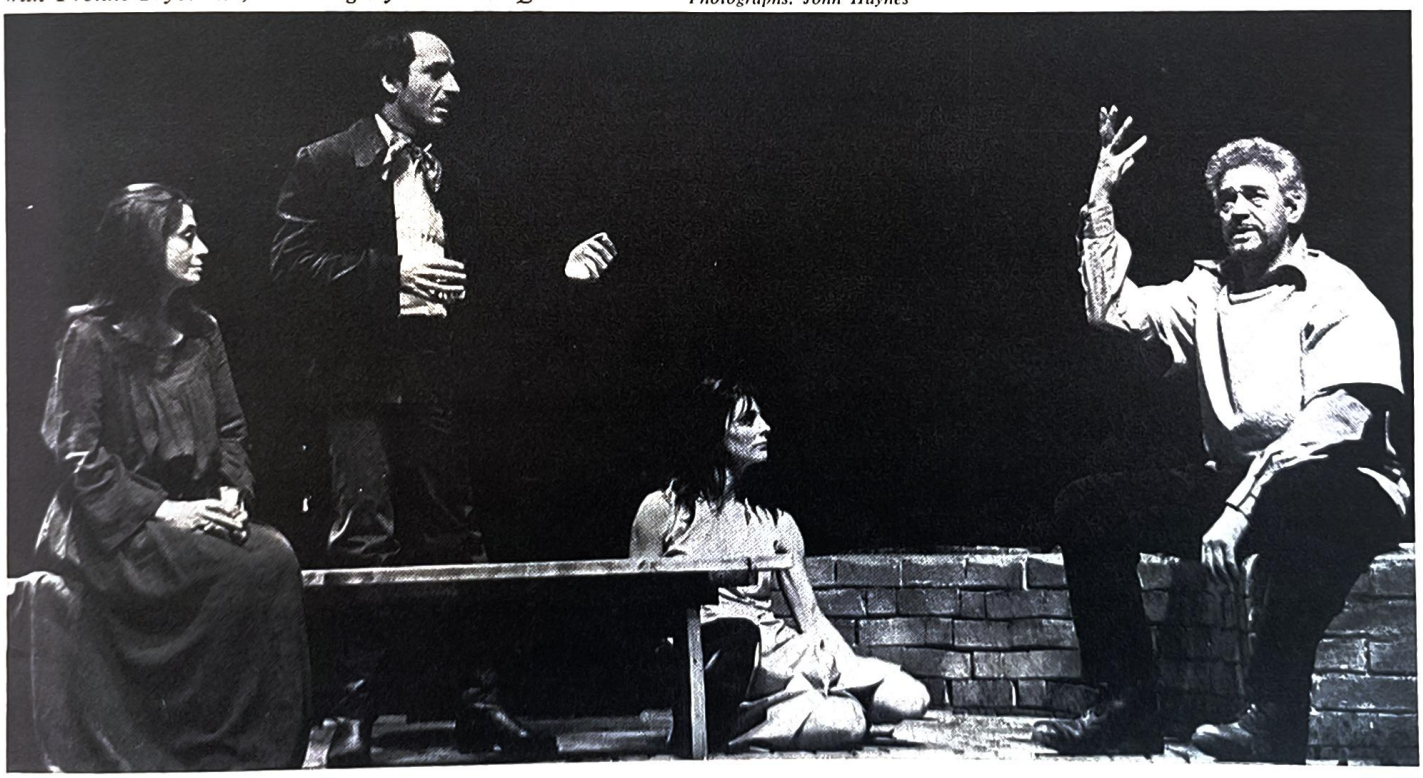
The power that is in the play arrives with the carcase on the rock. As the almost perceptible odour of rotting oppresses Dimetos and his housekeeper, it cracks the rigid structure of their lives and opens up the play to Fugard's preoccupations. Although the play, despite its evident Afrikaner distrust of cities, is not overtly political, there are similarities to the political plays. Fugard's anti-apartheid plays were not so directly concerned with the politics of situations as with his characters. It is the roles of individuals, whether in relation to the laws of physics or laws of government, which concern him. Dimetos's failure is to come to grips with the lawless nature of his desire.

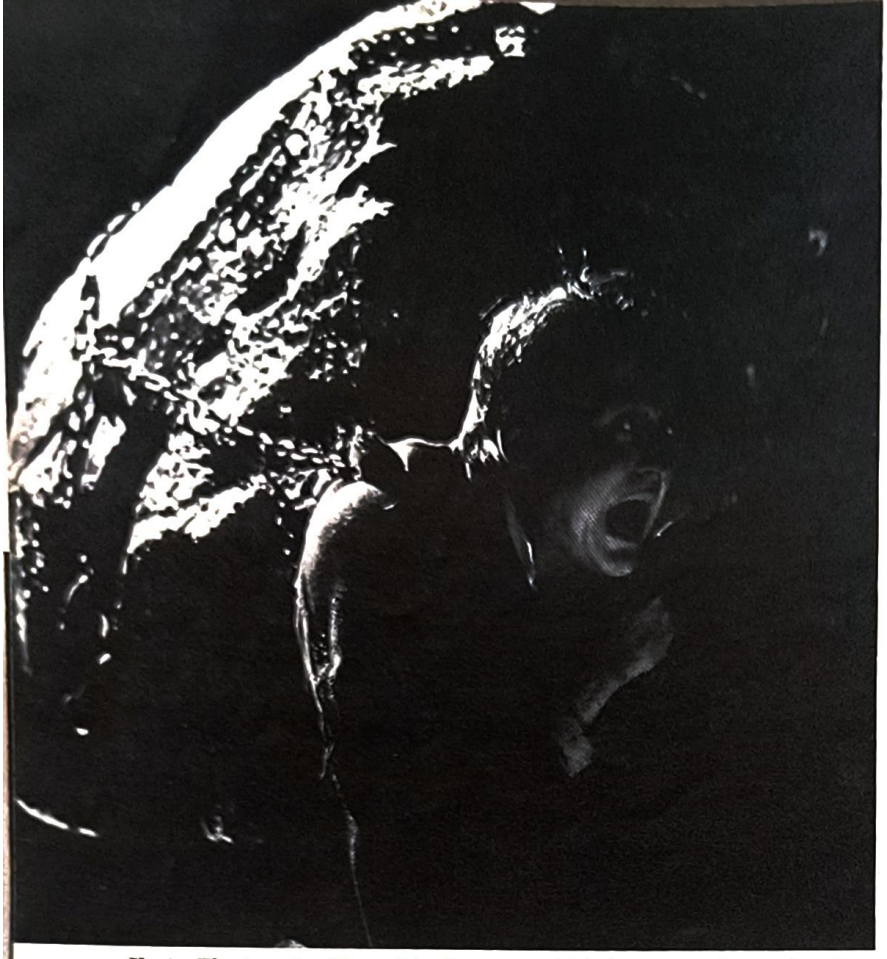
As I had hoped, Scofield managed to bring coherence to the obscure final monologues, using his elegant hands to illustrate the complicated concern with balance and centring that Fugard works to make into metaphor. Before the glimmer of redemption which Fugard offers at the end—there is a hint of a balance beyond physics—Scofield follows the logic of science with his arms, finally crucifying himself on the complicated geometry. Many confusions are still unresolved, but Scofield convinces that the meanings are there to be found. One of the suggestions from the midst of his madness is that a story is perhaps the finest thing a man can make, finding a centre from which to make a balance between beginning and end.

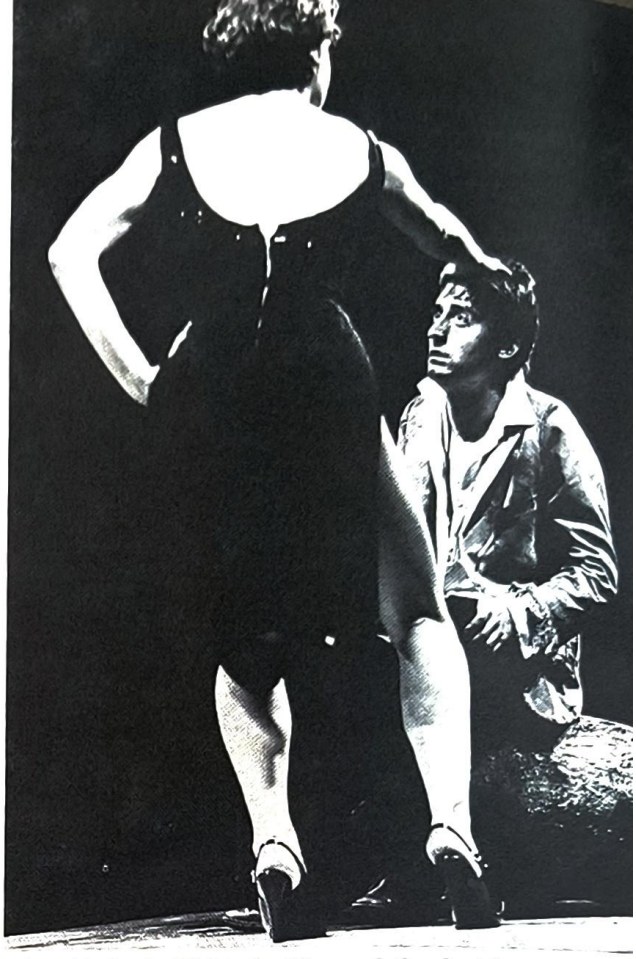
In this production the last half of the play also seemed the strongest because it pitted Scofield with Yvonne Bryceland, bringing two equals into dynamic interaction, albeit through monologues. The already evasive first act was made even more diffuse by the uncomprehending, vacuous presence Celia Quicke brought to the role of the niece. So witless was her characterisation—and so disappointing after her brilliant appearance in *Stallerhof*—that one could believe that she hanged herself simply because someone had foolishly taught her to tie a knot which would not slip. As Danilo, Ben Kingsley briefly brought her to life in the verbal foreplay before his assault, but even he became too obviously energetic in his efforts to enliven the curiously dead scene, and it never quite convinced.

For all its failings, *Dimetos* is undeniably the work of a major playwright. In the past year, with the single exception of Edward Bond's *The Fool,* it would be impossible to find a more serious, not to say dour, new play on the English stage, nor a play with more latent power. Although much of the intensity the South African company brought to the play in Edinburgh is gone, dispersed in the varied accents of the mostly English cast, *Dimetos* will certainly grow in importance, though in its present form it may forever elude an entirely satisfactory production.

Set in a remote province and based on an obscure myth mentioned in the notebooks of Albert Camus, Fugard's strange play met with grim London indifference last month. Opposite, Paul Scofield in the title role and, below, with Yvonne Bryceland, Ben Kingsley and Celia Quicke *Photographs: John Haynes*







Kevin Elyot as the Man with the stone which has grown into a boulder chained to his back. Right, the Man and the sluttish innkeeper (Anna Nygh) who sings and dances for him in exchange for the coins representing his virtues in Stone, *a one-act allegory treating 'the spell capitalism casts on both master and slave'* *Photographs: Nobby Clark*

STONE

STONE by Edward Bond. Presented by Gay Sweatshop at the ICA on 8 June 1976. Directed by Gerald Chapman, designed by Mary Moore, music composed by Robert Campbell, lighting by Steve Whitson.

Man, KEVIN ELYOT; *The Mason/The Judge,* TONY DOUSE; *The Tramp/Policeman/The Boy,* ANTHONY SHER; *The Girl/Washerwoman,* ANNA NYGH; *Musicians,* ROBERT CAMPBELL and TOM ROBINSON.

JOHN LAHR

IF ART has an ulterior purpose, Auden says in *The Dyer's Hand,* 'It is, by telling the truth, to disenchant . . .' Edward Bond is one of the few contemporary playwrights trying to find in metaphor antidotes to the terror and intoxications of the moment. Bond remains the most responsible English playwright and therefore the most misinterpreted. *The Fool* was the year's best play, and one of the decade's finest dramatic achievements. But *Stone,* Bond's latest one act, is a slight, hastily written allegory which addresses itself to the substantial question of the spell capitalism casts on both master and slave. Even if Bond does not penetrate to the core of this problem, he defines the parameter of this important idea. A prologue voiced-over a bare platform stage puts the issue concisely:

> Men are not asked who they are but ordered to be
> Cut to the shape of a square world . . .
> Why this unreason? . . .

Implicit in the question is Bond's theatrical tactic: to disintoxicate, to break the spell of unfreedom which makes everyone a sleepwalker in the modern landscape:

> This is the first obligation of all tools:
> Don't know your own function

The stone of his play's title is symbolic of the crippling burden of enchantment which increasingly deforms man as his life and being are lost to it.

Bond's allegory is a traditional tale. A pilgrim sets out to make his way in the world. He carries the seven gold coins of prudence, soberness, courage, honesty, love, justice and hope. On his journey, he meets Capitalism, Guilt, and Pleasure in the form of a stone mason, a tramp, and a sluttish inkeeper who dances 'The Song of the Seven Veils' for him. In all these encounters, the pilgrim is betrayed; his coin—the symbolic richness of his spirit—turns to the dross of pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, anger and sloth. 'Why did the coins change?' the pilgrim asks the stone mason in bewildered fury when he finally finds him at the end of his gruelling journey. 'Why did the stone grow?'

The stone is first given to the pilgrim by the stone mason as work, something the pilgrim is to carry to the mason's home. Bond presents the mason as a slick city hustler who, after showing the young man how easy it would be to steal his talents, gives him the illusion of freedom while conning him into a task which will keep him a slave for life. The pilgrim is ready to accept the stone mason's apparent faith and offer of work, although he never can quite see the point:

MAN: Why an ordinary stone?
MASON: It could be the ordinariness that interests me.
MAN: And wages?
MASON: You're paid when you deliver the goods.

Having struck the bargain of capitalism and still filled with hope, the pilgrim sets off on what seems like a straight road that gets more tortuous with every step. The stone turns into a brick and finally into a boulder chained to his back which lumbers and dwarfs the pilgrim.

The stone is still the size of a brick when the pilgrim meets the tramp who panhandles him for his talents by threatening to kill himself: 'I'll take my death off your conscience for six talents'. The pilgrim keeps the coin of hope and parts with the rest. 'Every evening I measure this stone and it's bigger,' he tells himself. '. . . Something good will happen to me when I deliver it. Some special reward. I'm glad I gave the rest of my money to him. My kindness will make the world a better place . . .' The tramp has put this illusion into the pilgrim's head: 'Why did your people give you money? To grow fat? Or make the world—god forgive me a blasphemous swine for saying so—a better place.' But the negotiation doesn't change the source of oppression, only shifts its centre. The pilgrim is allowed momentarily to indulge

a heroic illusion whose frustration will turn into murderous revenge.

By the time the pilgrim stumbles into an inn called 'The Dance of the Seven Veils', he's aged, filthy, lost and beleaguered by the weight he carries. The pilgrim meets the tramp and fights him for his original coins. They are a match for each other's cruelty. The inkeeper intones:

You say you do as you would be done by
But you don't know what you do
You do as you are done by
That's all you are able to do

Bond's songs are more powerful and provocative than the situations on which they comment. The inkeeper sings and does her dance for the pilgrim who pays out his coin for food, shelter, entertainment and forgetfulness. Although she sings hard truths to him, the pilgrim is too dazed and lumbered to take them in. Her song — a fine piece of writing clumsily rendered by Anna Nygh—puts Bond's obsession in a nutshell:

How is society organised?
For the happiness of the people?
Or so that profit can be drawn
At as many points as possible
What do you want out of the cow?
Milk or blood?
Then stop sticking your knife in
All over it's hide . . .

The pilgrim finally delivers his load to the stone mason and shows him his seven gold coins still shining and intact. The mason is dramatised squeezing 'blood' from a stone. Still not unburdened of his weight, the pilgrim finds the mason is trying to do the same to him, offering him a job as his servant. But the pilgrim is querulous. The mason rebukes him for asking him why the stone grew and why his coins were debased: 'Servants don't argue.' The pilgrim has a notion of the waste of his talents and his exploitation:

The steps of your life measure out a duel
And the weapons are chosen by your enemy

He gets continual denials and insults from the stone mason and finally threatens to kill him. The threat of violence brings the promise of compromise ('. . . I'll make you a partner. It's time I had new blood . . .'); but the pilgrim wants no part of the old system and crushes him under the weight of his stone. With rebellion comes rebirth, the pilgrim calls to a washerwoman hanging out laundry: 'I want to wash my hands.'

Bond's longing, like the pilgrim's, to somehow break the circle of exploitation is indicative of his work; but *Stone* is too generalised and abstruse a metaphor to inspire feeling or clinch the argument for radical purity that Bond seems to imply is the only answer to radical inhumanity. *Stone* is efficiently directed by Gerald Chapman for The Gay Sweatshop at the ICA; but only Antony Sher, as the Tramp, emerged from the production with any glory. Bond's allegory indulges his appetite for philosophising when his genius is in evoking the dynamics of personality and suffering in specific situations.

THE WINTER'S TALE

Stratford-upon-Avon

MICHAEL COVENEY

THE FIRST mystery about this production is in no way Shakespearian but merely practical. Why, having gone to so much trouble this year in 'democratising' the theatre space available by building into the auditorium and generally opening out the stage, does the design disguise the actors in Scandinavian party dress (in Sicilia) and ugly parodies of rustic attire (in Bohemia)? Further, the stage is closed off at the back for half the play by curtains covered in child-like hieroglyphics, an effect that strikes one as a somewhat jaded cultural recapitulation of Trevor Nunn's 1969 production with Sicilia represented as an all-white nursery.

After the thorough setting of *Much Ado* in colonial India, this production is a sharp descent, despite a bristling performance by Ian McKellen in a part ideally suited to his temperament and verse-speaking abilities. This Leontes quivers with jealous rage almost from the start, reacting to his wife's genteel hospitality towards Polixenes—(John Woodvine bearing an unfortunate resemblance to an ageing hippy, his hair tied in an elastic band, his feet shod in fluffy snow boots)—in the way Othello usually does when Desdemona starts sticking up for Cassio. And McKellen's transformation after the interval from hot-headed avenger to penitent recluse is admirably done.

What the production lacks at its centre is any forceful ideas about unlocking the magical and celebratory in the play with stage images that match the poetry. There are a few ritualistic touches with the bringing of the oracle and the dancing round the maypole, but they don't spring from any well of inspiration being consistently mined in the performance.

OTHELLO

Regent's Park

SALLY EMERSON

THE SEASON at the Open Air Theatre, Regent's Park, opened with a plain man's *Othello*. From the three-tiered citadel which towered over the stage actors popped out like Jack-in-the-boxes. Its coppery-green ugliness separated it off from the surrounding foliage and left no doubt that the setting was urban.

Robert Stephens played Othello with dignity but little grandeur. The magnificent self-delusion and bombast of Shakespeare's Moor was lulled to mere recognition of his achievements as a soldier and his later madness lacked the fire of frenzy. Desdemona's wetness also belittled Othello. Gone was the spirited woman who'd renounced the 'curled darlings' of her nation and deceived her father for the sake of the exotic Othello with his tales of wild lands and feats of bravery. Instead we were offered a madonna escaped from a church altar: a scrawny fair-haired lady, played by Lorna Heilbron, with a piping little voice and a cornflower blue dress. In this production Othello loved Desdemona for her purity and her flattery and it was all too easy for Iago to sully an affection based on such foundations. Given Desdemona's meekness, it was no surprise that she let Othello's jealousy run its course without demanding explanation of his disjointed behaviour. Lorna Heilbron's performance crammed Desdemona into a consistent character but one unworthy of respect. It was hard to care about her death.

Iago, too, had much of his complexity trimmed away. The night I saw *Othello* Edward Fox's understudy, John Bowe, was playing his part. With his handsome dark-eyed young face and agreeable manner, you could see why everyone called him 'honest Iago'. He was one of the lads, laughing and slapping hands with his mates. Othello's trust in him was perfectly credible. Iago manipulated his prey with charm. He dropped the pellets of doubt into Othello's mind like a helpful friend offering asprins for a headache. As the poison flooded through Othello, disarming him from soldier to jealous savage, the tempo of their exchanges was well orchestrated by Iago, who remained friendly and reasonable while Othello raged. But when alone and machinating in the quiet of his skull Iago was still likeable. His face and words were not disfigured by hate. He was enjoying himself, as if embarked on a youthful prank. Of the various motives which Iago manufactures to explain his villainy, this production played up his suspicion that Othello had had his wife Emilia. The motive made Iago's actions human rather than devilish and focussed the play on a central theme of sexual jealousy. Iago enmeshed Othello in the net of jealousy in which Iago was himself caught. But, in packaging the play in so tidy and realistic a form, Mervyn Willis's production suffocated much of the rampant evil of Iago and the ranting glory of Othello.

Ursula Mohan's Emilia alone broke loose. Bustling around the stage, vivacious and worldly yet sadly deceived in her husband, she was no simple automaton but a creature of conflicting emotions. She suspected her husband but trusted him. She doted on her mistress but stole her cherished handkerchief. She loved Iago, throwing her arms round his waist when he'd let her, but denounced him. Her voice finally cried out, clear and true, against the foolish Moor, the villianous Iago and wailed at the murder of the virtuous Desdemona. Emilia's own death was both glorious and pitiful.

IRENE

IRENE, book by Hugh Wheeler and Joseph Stein based on original play by James Montgomery. Presented by Harold Fielding at the Adelphi Theatre on 15 June 1976. Directed by Freddie Carpenter, choreography by Norman Maen, musical direction by Michael Reed, lighting by Richard Pilbrow and Howard Eldridge.

Mrs O'Dare, JESSIE EVANS; *Jane*, JANET MAHONEY; *Helen*, JENNY LOGAN; *Irene O'Dare*, JULIE ANTHONY; *Emmeline Marshall*, HELEN CHRISTIE; *Clarkson*, CHRIS DYSON; *Donald Marshall*, ERIC FLYNN; *Ozzie Babson*, DAMON SANDERS; *Madame Lucy*, JON PERTWEE; *Mrs McFudd*, MADELEINE ORR. *Dancers:* JOSIE ASHCROFT, AUBREY BUDD, CHRISTINE CARTWRIGHT, BILL BRYSDALE, MARY DUNNE, DEBBIE HEARNDEN, GERRY HUNT, GERALDINE LONG, FRANCESCA LUCY, JENNY LYONS, PETER PANTELIC, ANNE PRYCE, BRUCE SCOTT, PENNY STEVENSON, LESLEY SUMMERS, TREVOR WILLIS.

JULIAN JEBB

THERE are nineteen names in the production and technical credits for the *Irene* programme. There is a 'Book' by two men 'from an adaptation' by another which is 'Based on the original play' by a fourth. That's a lot for a show which advertises itself as 'The Musical Musical'. The words which come between the numbers concern a young Irish New York girl who works as a piano tuner, has two plain but vigorous girl friends, a broth of a mother, a rich admirer, a lot of colourfully dressed neighbours and, alas, no charm. As for the words themselves they're more like a mixture of anti-freeze and setting lotion than a script: they are sprayed or poured at the audience with a bewildering disregard for either wit or innocence. *Irene* isn't a flop, it's a dull thud.

Some of the tunes from the earlier versions of the show are lovely, notably the most famous which include 'Alice Blue Gown', 'I'm Always Chasing Rainbows' and 'You Made Me Love You'. Julie Anthony as Irene sings these with accomplishment; she's got a lot of volume and good enunciation and sometimes she can remind you for a minute or two of Kiri Te Kanawa, but the director and choreographer of the show have brought out little more than a nagging brightness in her performance.

The Adelphi is a good theatre to show off Kenneth Rowell's sets, which alternate between the lustrously shabby to the ingeniously ornate in a pastiche of Art Deco. The musical direction by Michael Reed is efficient and lively. Of the rest of those credited it's better not to speak.

The word often used by critics to describe a show like *Irene* is 'undemanding'. It is the wrong word. The audience is asked to accept a gift-wrapped parcel with nothing inside it as a beautiful present. The showmanship which encourages this sort of production is debased because it has neither a tenderness for style nor accuracy of timing which is essential to producing enjoyment. If a show is going to be light-weight, first it's got to be light. No amount of drilled cavorting or calculated self-confidence is a substitute for imagination and gaiety. *Irene* is re-cycled mutton. It's impossible to tell whether somewhere there's a lamb screaming to get out.

LIZA OF LAMBETH

LIZA OF LAMBETH, book and lyrics by William Rushton and Berny Stringle after Somerset Maugham. Presented by John Fenston and Ben Arbeid in association with John French at the Shaftesbury Theatre on 8 June 1976. Directed by Berny Stringle, music by Cliff Adams, designed by Christopher Morley, musical direction by John Burrows.

Polly Avery, MAGGIE VICKERS; *Mrs Dolly Hawkins*, PEGGY ANN JONES; *Mrs Lil Downes*, PAMELA CUNDELL; *Mrs Violet Hodge*, STELLA TANNER; *Mrs Florence Adair*, JEAN REEVE; *Tommy Pratt*, CHRISTOPHER NEIL; *Mrs Selina Kemp*, PATRICIA HAYES; *Harry Adair*, BRIAN HALL; *Mr Albert Hodge*, MICHAEL ROBBINS; *Mr Alfred Downes*, TONY HUGHES; *Arthur 'Gipsy' Smith*, DUDLEY STEVENS; *Billy Broadribb*, KENNETH CASWELL; *Liza Kemp*, ANGELA RICHARDS; *Sally Hodge*, TINA MARTIN; *Tilly Bastick*, JAN TODD; *Charlie Hawkins* FRANK CODA; *Jim Blakeston*, BRYAN MARSHALL; *Kate Blackston*, KATE WILLIAMS; *Rosie Cohen*, PADDY GLYNN; *Manny Jacobs*, DAVID RAYNER; *Fingers Philips*, RON PEMBER; *Osric Bensoon*, ERIC SHILLING; *Barrington Brown*, DAVID BOWMAN; *Nathaniel Novello*, DUDLEY STEVENS; *Archibald Lupino*, KENNETH CASWELL; *Constance Carmichael*, PEGGY ANN JONES; *Maudie Metz*, JEANNIE HARRIS; *Dr Ashendon*, KENNETH CASWELL; *Lenny Vosper*, RICHARD MERSON.

ANTHONY CURTIS

THE NOVELS of Somerset Maugham hang like ripe fruit waiting to be plucked by the musical-maker. Tony Richardson toyed a long time ago with *Of Human Bondage*; others have gazed money-wateringly at *Cakes and Ale* and *The Moon and Sixpence* (which has been made into an opera). But their hands have been stayed either by the Maugham estate or by the wisdom of reflection. Now, though, *Liza of Lambeth* has been ripped from the tree by Cliff Adams (music) William Rushton and Berny Stringle (book, lyrics and direction); and the consequences on the stage of the Shaftesbury, if not quite as catastrophic for the human race as those in Eden on an earlier occasion, are bad enough for one to hope it will be a very long time before the experiment is repeated.

Maugham wrote the novel while he was still a medical student at St Thomas's Hospital and he based it on his stint of 'midder' in the 1890's when he was on call with his black bag delivering babies in the slums of Lambeth. He was horrified by the life he saw and he devised a slight plot lightened by a few flecks of Cockney humour to contain the horror. It was a remarkably assured first book. Each episode, Liza's spurning of her boyfriend, her seduction by a married man, her ostracism by the Street, her pregnancy, her fight with her lover's wife, the selfishness of her wicked old mum, her death at the end, slots neatly into the structure.

Once you try to pull any of the parts out to make general points in the way that musicals do the whole thing comes toppling down in ruins. Maugham's restraint in his handling of the material is countered in the musical by warm, extroverted showbiz vulgarity. A chorus of battered females lift up their skirts in an opening number to complain about 'Usbands' and in this same vein much of the show is padded out with what seems like a job-lot from the dismantled Collins's Music Hall. Angela Richards's genteel charm appears to be totally wrong for the tough self-reliant young woman she is supposed to be playing, while Christopher Neil as her boyfriend, and Bryan Marshall as her bearded lover, have an impossible task to give the main situation any depth. Around them is masses of tawdry packaging in the form of a Lancashire drunk, a sentimental Jewish tailor, a troupe of out of work actors who sing songs parodying Gilbert and Sullivan, tipsy guests at a wedding-feast, chases down drainpipes out of bedrooms, and the Mrs Gamp-like moaning of Liza's mum (Patricia Hayes).

In desperation for something to praise one falls back on the décor. I came out whistling the set, as a wag once put it. Christopher Morley may be congratulated on his horse-drawn open-top omnibus that takes them all to Chingford on Bank 'Oliday and for the frowsty façades of Vere Street, but I do wish they could have devised some means of keeping these in place for longer periods. By the end of the evening I was suffering not just from boredom but also from vertigo.

LEAVE HIM TO HEAVEN

LEAVE HIM TO HEAVEN by Ken Lee. Presented by Roger Clifford for London Plays Ltd and Bill Wellings at the New London Theatre on 2 June 1976. Directed by Philip Hedley, choreography by Pat Adams, musical direction by Neil McArthur, designed by Ken Lee, lighting by David Lindsey and musical arrangements by Neil McArthur and Brian Protheroe.

Conway Terle, BRIAN PROTHEROE; *Morton*, LARRY DANN; *Eddie*, KEN SHORTER; *Johnny*, PAUL FELBER; *Louis*, COLIN COPPERFIELD; *Joe*, STEVEN PACEY; *Adele*, CINDY WELLS; *Janee*, SUE BOND; *Roxanne* ANITA DOBSON; *Verona*, NICKY CROYDON; *Luanne*, LIZ WHITE.

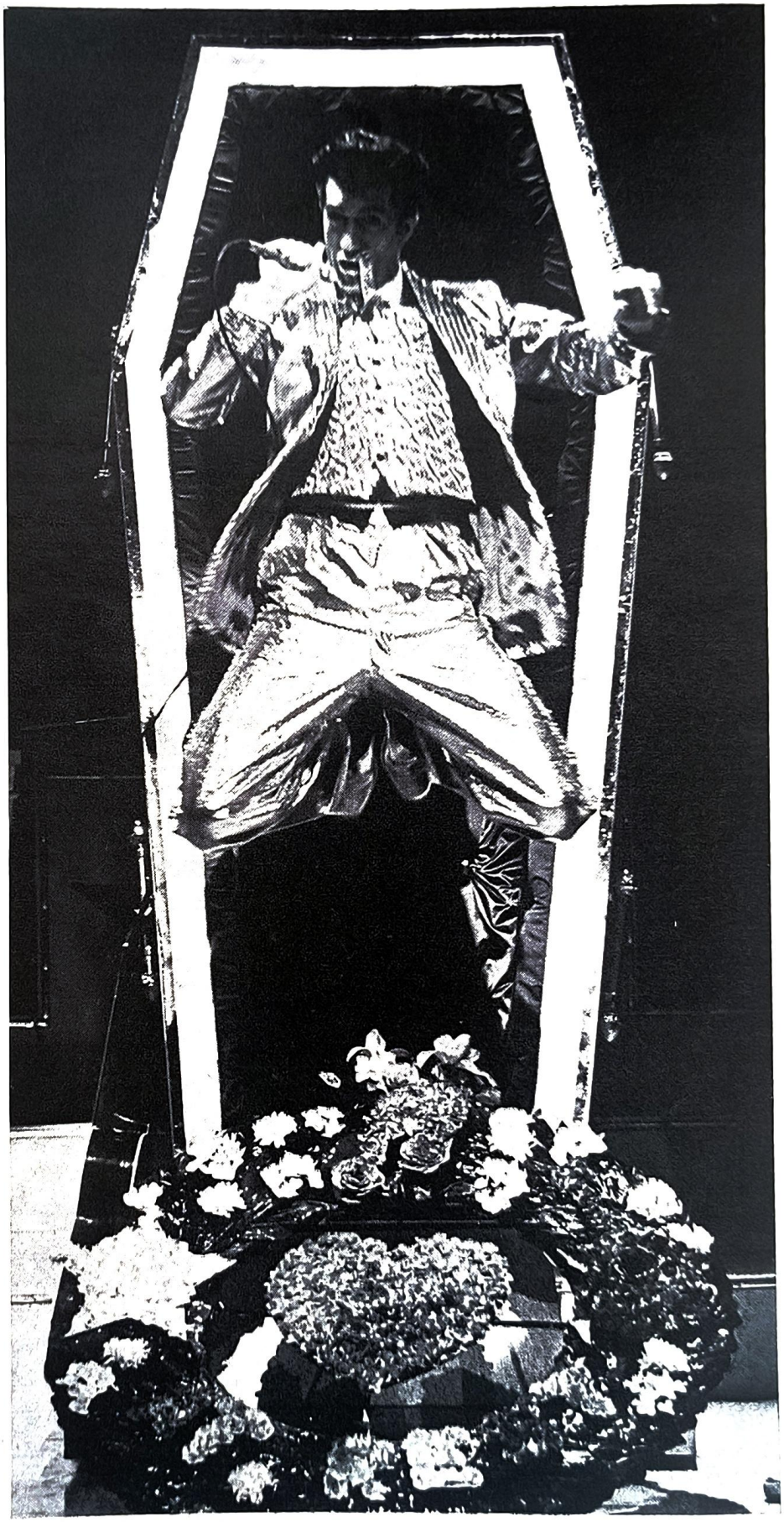
GEOFF BROWN

A NOSTALGIC FONDNESS for a past decade and life-style is defensible enough (particularly if one has never lived through the decade personally), but Ken Lee seems dangerously capable of embracing every decade and life-style with a loving hug: while *Happy as a Sandbag* continues to provide 'all the fun of the forties' at the Ambassador's, another period extravaganza makes its London début a few streets further east in Drury Lane, offering all the fun of the late fifties and early

sixties. One can't help worrying about the kind of life-style their creator adopts himself. Does he try to slip farthings to bus conductors, or ask for Fry's Five Boys chocolate and packets of dried egg at his supermarket? And how does he dress? 1936-style on Monday, 1956 on Tuesday, half and half on Wednesday? The worries wouldn't arise if Lee did something constructive with his jaunts down memory lane—using the nostalgic material to score some critical, satirical points at the expense of past times or the present, or building his oddments into a theatrically enveloping experience deriving its appeal from something more than audiences' memories and a hard-working cast.

But he hardly ever does: he seems to horde period bric-a-brac as a squirrel hordes nuts, building them up in a nice pile and letting them lie there. *Happy as a Sandbag* should really have been called *Happy as a Ragbag*—songs, sketches, impersonations of Famous People and Famous Films, cooking recipes, were all thrown together willy-nilly, and the evening's success firmly rested on the considerable skills and unflagging energy of its likeable performers. *Leave Him to Heaven* shows a slight advance in organisation, for there's a whiff of plot: a schoolboy is picked off the streets and metamorphosed into a rock-and-roll singer, Conway Terle (played, to great effect, by Brian Protheroe); we then see him shoot to stardom and immortality, surrounded all the way by a manager, ideas man, girls and other hangers-on. But the basic material still consists of isolated historical exhibits: we hear no less than forty-four 'blasts from the past, tracks from way back, rockers from the locker, platters that matter' (I quote from Tim Rice's effusive article which provides the programme with some welcome meat). And we hear them in surroundings rich in fifties snazziness—a network of glittering coloured stars and circles. Other 'related material', such as radio and TV advertisements, are enacted in between the numbers: a giant Old Spice bottle is displayed by a girl on roller-skates, and a 'Conwayburger' (a concoction the size and shape of a concertina) also puts in a brief, telling appearance.

The era's recreation doesn't seem as knowing and assured as it was in *Sandbag*, and some of the verbal details definitely jar (a review of a movie in *Variety* by Pauline Kael? Never!). But the cast's enthusiasm and Philip Hedley's effervescent staging are still noteworthy. As the evening continues, the numbers are presented in increasingly elaborate ways: for 'I Can Never Go Home' a white garden gate with a hoop of plastic fruit and greenery is ushered on, along with a girl who gingerly leans on it with a bland smile; for 'I Believe' the Virgin Mary plus accompanying child and cloud descends from the skies.



Brian Protheroe in the rock 'n' roll music Leave Him to Heaven

Photograph: Nobby Clark

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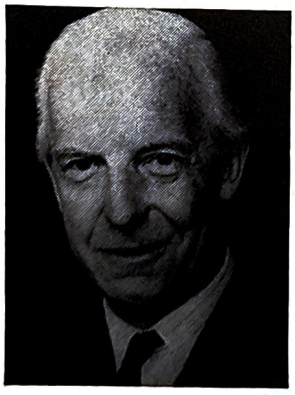

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THE FAMILY DANCE

BAGGAGE

THE FAMILY DANCE by Felicity Browne. Presented by H M Tennent by arrangement with Donald Albery at the Criterion Theatre on 5 June 1976. Directed by Jonathan Hales, designed by Eileen Diss, costumes by Robin Fraser Pye, lighting by Leonard Tucker.

Ben Musgrave, ALEC McCOWEN; *Toby Musgrave*, MICHAEL BRYANT; *Diana Verney*, HELEN LINDSAY; *Sophie Musgrave*, ANNETTE CROSBIE; *Victoria Musgrave*, JUDY PARFITT; *Charles Verney*, JAMES WARWICK; *Michael Verney*, ANTHONY NASH.

BAGGAGE by Lee Langley. Presented by Michael White at the Vaudeville Theatre on 17 June 1976. Directed by Val May, designed by Graham Brown, lighting by Andrew A Gardner.

Michael, GERALD HARPER; *Helen*, HANNAH GORDON; *Ann*, UNA STUBBS; *John*, IAN MARTER; *Kate*, PRUNELLA GEE; *Chris*, DAVID WARWICK; *Leila*, JUDY BUXTON.

LUCY HUGHES-HALLETT

FELICITY BROWNE'S characters are all related by blood or marriage and all live together in a large house in the home counties. The scene is set in the kitchen. On the other side of the green baize door the younger generation are giving a dance while their parents disport themselves in a domestic dance of death over the salad dressing and sausage rolls. They are all suffering from middle-age and the various forms of melancholy and spleen attendant thereon. Ben Musgrave, played with a mixture of winning petulance and fatiguing bluster by Alec McCowen, has made the upkeep of his family and home his life's work and is not proud of it. He bullies his introverted painter wife. (As indeed anyone would. As played by Annette Crosbie she has a cringing please-don't-kick-me look that would make it impossible for a husband to keep his toecaps to himself.) His sister bosses him around. His brother, debilitated by a private income and a wretched marriage, spoils the children's parties with his alcoholic horrors and assorted in-laws sponge and copulate and stir up trouble. Each of these people, all of whom have been living together for seventeen years, chooses the night of the dance to lay bare his soul to the others and to us.

Unfortunately few of them are likeable and none of them are complex enough for the bare exploration of their lives and personalities to make drama, and since the plot is non-existent the play begins to drag. The spine-tinglingly embarrassing finale when all forget their differences to watch the children dance barefoot in the dew suggests that the night's depressing exchange of home-truths may lead to better days, but such a hope is not born out by the preceding non-action.

Michael Bryant gives a marvellous performance as the drunken younger brother, not just acting charm but radiating it, and most of the play's true pathos emanates from him. Helen Lindsay plays the perfect house-wife sister with a true-blue ladylike air, hinting delicately at hidden sadness kept pluckily under control, and the various in-laws, hypochondriac, adultress and lounge-lizard, are efficiently performed by Anthony Nash, Judy Parfitt and James Warwick respectively.

The miseries of being middle-aged (or, to be precise, forty-five) also bulk largely in *Baggage*. Michael (Gerald Harper) has worked his way up from the factory floor to the top of two prestigious if unproductive professions, first advertising and then management consultancy. He has been married, but has escaped and fixed himself up with an amenable team of girls, one for each night of the week. He's charming, handsome and wears well-cut Italian suits and silk scarves. He very nearly talks with an Oxbridge accent but retains one or two attractively working-class vowel sounds. He is, of course, lonely and insecure.

You probably recognise Michael. You are more likely to have come across him in some fictional form than to have met him at a party, but, all the same, he is a credible figure and a useful pivot for a play. He can be made fun of, admired or pitied and his story writes itself. In *Baggage* Lee Langley has surrounded him with a cast of equally familiar figures. We have the seventeen-year-old son who believes in doing things with his hands and despises his father's tawdry trattoria flash, the jolly girl who'll bed down with anyone who needs her, the golden-hearted whore next-door, the pipe-smoking film buff and, oldest friend of all, Cinderella. The latter has been updated a little and appears as the super-efficient secretary, transformed by a change of clothes into the office sexpot. Una Stubbs plays her endearingly, waddling sweetly on her new platform soles.

The only character who can't be so neatly pigeon-holed is the ex-wife and, in spite of Hannah Gordon's intelligent performance, she gets swamped by all these larger-than-life caricatures around her. Since the main strand in a rather knotted plot is that of Michael's attempt to get her back, this weakness is crucial. Had she been a loudmouthed shrew with dyed hair, or perhaps an alcoholic, we would all have known where we were—firmly on the other side of the footlights watching a fairly funny play about people who have nothing to do with us. But Helen's humanity upsets the balance. She's not comic, but taking her seriously leads inevitably to taking Michael seriously, and that's out of the question. The result is a general uneasiness. Lee Langley seems to have written a straightforward situation comedy but yet there aren't many gags. When Michael's son surprises him in bed with their shared mistress (a classical farcical situation, you would have thought) he starts an earnest discussion of the generation gap.

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STRATFORD, ONTARIO

B A YOUNG

THIS is the third year of Robin Phillips's four-year contract as Artistic Director at Stratford, Ontario. The appointment was greeted with a good deal of nationalistic opposition when it was made, and in the Toronto papers especially sniping still goes on. It is by no means sure that Mr Phillips will want to continue there if he is offered an extension; and to judge by the standard of this year's work his loss would be a disaster.

The two show-pieces are *The Way of the World*, with which the festival opened, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. In the Congreve, Maggie Smith shows herself a comedienne of such superb quality that it is quite extraordinary that she should not be playing parts of the calibre of Millamant for us all the time. As Cleopatra she shows another facet of her talent as a wilful, predatory charmer who has lured the upright Antony of Keith Baxter into a case of genuine adoration that brings him to disgrace and death. These two productions, directed by Phillips, designed by Daphne Dare and lit by Gil Wechsler, are of world class.

The third Shakespeare play in the big 2,800-seat Festival Theatre with its Guthriean thrust stage is *The Merchant of Venice*, directed by a Toronto director, Bill Glassco, without much panache. He has a good Shylock from Hume Cronyn (whose wife Jessica Tandy is a likeable Wishfort in the Congreve) and an attractive Portia in Jackie Burroughs. But his Bassanio, Nick Mancuso, a graduate from the Toronto fringe, shambles and mumbles, and his Antonio (Lewis Gordon, a resonant Enobarbus in *Antony and Cleopatra*) gets little chance.

At the small proscenium house, the Avon, there are two more Shakespeares and *The Importance*. To clear this last out of the way, it is conventional and well played, and the fact that Lady Bracknell is played by William Hutt is an oddity one is able to forget after he has been on stage a couple of minutes.

Hamlet is being done with alternating Princes, native Canadian Richard Monette (all of whom we saw in the original London company of *Oh! Calcutta!*) and new Canadian Nicholas Pennell. The production smoulders beneath its dark colouring, a black cyclorama and black and grey costumes, erupting into moments of great excitement. Monette is a sturdily zealous Hamlet with reserves of tenderness. Pennell is icily aristocratic with no tenderness at all but a beautiful way with some of the great speeches. I approve Pennell's characterisation but I preferred Monette's performance. I liked Michael Liscinsky's Claudius too, Eric Donkin's Polonius (who gives Laertes his precepts while going through his in-tray, without looking up from his business) and Marti Maraden's Ophelia. Mr Phillips brings her on in the mad scenes in a strait-jacket, guarded by a couple of nuns. He has fun with the Players, too, whom he makes guilty of all the faults Hamlet has done his best to talk them out of.

The Tempest is beautiful, with a fascinating visual effect: a black backcloth that one imagines representing deep space crystallises upstage into a chorus of spirits, mute black-clad figures that in balletic movements can set a mood, suggest an action or simply dress the stage. There is a fine storm conjured up with well-chosen movement around a single flapping sail.

William Hutt is Prospero, a rather stern character who hardly seems to deserve the love Nicholas Pennell's Ariel shows for him at the end. Richard Monette, the other Hamlet, is Caliban, more humanoid than usual; Mr Phillips's productions do not go in for visual representations that can be suggested by the proper interpretation of the text, and Ariel and Caliban, both almost human, neither quite, make a true contrast of good and evil.

Still to come are *Measure for Measure*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Three Sisters* and a new play, *Eve*, adapted by a Canadian playwright, Larry Fineberg, from a Canadian novel by Constance Beresford-Howe.

GERMANY

RONALD HOLLOWAY

FOR THE SECOND YEAR in a row the Berliner Theatertreffen has missed the 'big play' in citing the 'most remarkable productions of the year'. Last spring the ten-member jury of theatre critics covering West Germany, Austria, and Switzerland (East Germany refuses to participate) passed over Samuel Beckett's own production of *Waiting for Godot* at the Schiller-Theater in West Berlin, his unique turn-of-the-switch on usual interpretations of the play by directing it primarily as a comedy; the resonance the production had outside West Germany left the Theatertreffen Jury with egg on its collective face.

The same is about to happen this year with the snubbing of Hansgünther Heyme's production of Goethe's *Urfaust* at the Cologne Schauspielhaus. The play already has been invited abroad, and there it will surely win recognition as a profound portrait of the typical German *Spiessbürger* whose taste for the arts is skin-deep. Insiders have said that *Urfaust* was passed over as 'too manneristic', just as *Waiting for Godot* was judged 'too classical' by, practically speaking, the same jury (only two members have changed) last year.

The embarrassment lies in the other selections, some of which can't even be mentioned in the same breath with *Urfaust*. But since they are representative of 'established theatre'—three productions from West Berlin, two apiece from Frankfurt and Stuttgart, and one each from Hamburg, Munich, and Zurich — they found favour, and the Berliner Theatertreffen became an 'in' selection of odds-and-ends on the vast German-theatre landscape.

The choices were the following: Claus Peymann's circus-interpretation of Kleist's *Das Käthchen von Heilbronn* (Stuttgart Schauspielhaus), Ernst Wendt's Malersaal production of Heiner Müller's *Die Schlacht* (*The Battle*) (Hamburg Schauspielhaus), Niels-Peter Rudolph's productions of Botho Strauss's *Bekannte Geschichter, gemischte Gefühle (Familiar Faces, Mixed Feelings)* (Stuttgart Schauspielhaus) and Chekhov's *Onkel Vanja* (*Uncle Vanya*) (Schlosspark-Theater Berlin), Luc Bondy's updated view of Marivaux's *Die Unbeständlichkeit der Liebe* (*La double inconstance*), Wolfgang Kolneder's youth-theatre production of Volker Ludwig and Detlef Michel's original *Das hältste ja im Kopf nicht aus* (*It's Enough to Drive You Mad*) (Grips-Theater Berlin), Peter Löscher's view of David Rudkin's *Vor der Nacht* (*Before Night Falls*) (Frankfurt Schauspielhaus), Dieter Reible's updating of Friedrich Wolf's *Zeitstück* of the 1920s, *Cyankali* (*Cyanide*) (Theater am Neumarkt Zurich), and Rudolf Noelte's personal view of Shaw's *Der Arzt am Schneideweg* (*The Doctor's Dilemma*) (Munich Kammerspiele). Peter Brook's production of Denis Cannan and Colin Higgins's *The Ik* was also invited for special performances at the Theatre Meeting. An oddity in the printed programme points to the direction the festival as a whole takes for guidelines: the play director's name appears in heavy black print, while the playwright himself is reduced to small letters!

The interesting and absorbing evenings, however, were spent with new plays by contemporary dramatists: Heiner Müller's *The Battle* and Botho Strauss's *Familiar Faces, Mixed Feelings*; both of these productions were remarkable in the manner of interpretation.

Heiner Müller, recently back from a stay at the University of California in Berkeley, is one of the most gifted playwrights in the German language today. His *The Battle* in the tiny Malersaal annex of the Hamburg Schauspielhaus is a collection of powerful visual images from the blackest period in modern German history that reaches, however, beyond borders to spotlight the brutality of war. It's the kind of apocalyptic vision (the word 'play' hardly seems to apply here) that captures the horror of this century in agonising terms: man is man's worst enemy as the war fades momentarily into the background. *The Battle* has two frightening scenes of cannibalism and distortions of the mind to wipe out codes of morality with swift brush strokes leaving deep traces in the memory. A play made for the intimacy of the Malersaal, the staging of decrepit furniture bathed in

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eerie, subterranean lighting brings a decaying flesh-and-blood reality to Müller's sketches, which can be read as text in ten minutes.

Ernst Wendt puts each scene in focus with a hand for precise theatrical effects: he presents a mosaic of design, lighting, music, mime, and diction. The repetition of the first scene of 'Brother Against Brother' effectively underscores the universality of the evening, as not just shirts but personalities as well are exchanged to bring irony and a certain weariness into the 'battle' between Communist and Nazi ideologies. The decision to mime the prologue to the *Kleinbürgerhochzeit* scene colours the *Spiessbürger*-idyll with satirical, bitter black comedy and is a high point in this surrealistic portrait of a ruined city of shattered people. But, by contrast, the switch to a parody of Russian war films in the closing scene falls out-of-character and betrays the text to which Wendt otherwise pays respectful attention: a flag-waving parade is hardly the same as a symbolic distribution of bread (Russians to Germans), as Müller wrote it. One has only to visit the production at the Volksbühne in East Berlin to note the difference.

The *Spiessbürger* is the central figure again in Botho Strauss's *Familiar Faces, Mixed Feelings*. Like poses in a wax museum, we know these people all too well—for their strident voices and plastic grimaces jar the sensibilities at cocktail parties, company outings, carnival celebrations, and (of course) theatre premieres. Their masks are interchangeable in our noncommunicating, imitative society: these are the peacocks of our privileged free-time, the marionettes on strings, the mannikins without traditional social graces, the career-seekers frozen into icebergs of self-complacence. The Austrian dramatists Thomas Bernhard and Peter Handke know this milieu well, and now Strauss has joined the inner circle of contemporary playwrights concerned with banalities of contemporary culture.

Nothing really happens in the play: there is no beginning and no end. Seven people in the postwar Adenauer period of revived economic growth spend their Christmas holidays in a vacant hotel on the Rhine near Bonn. Their conversation is banal and, at times, funny: one likes to eat, another trains with her partner for an amateur dance contest, a third does magic tricks, a fourth craves sexual company—until we have run the gamut of impotence, indifference, and other vulgarities of the mind and soul. The same group of people populated Bunuel's *The Exterminating Angel* (the similarity is too close for comfort), but other movies such as *Grand Hotel* and *Separate Tables* (originally a play) come quickly to mind.

Niels-Peter Rudolph, with strong assistance from a Karl-Ernst Herrmann stage design, simply paces these figures in a never-never land of solo performances and grandstanding, in a large, decorative, suffocating chamber with a 'No-Exit' sign already hinted above the doors. The insight and precision a gifted Stuttgart ensemble bring to Strauss's play save a few otherwise vexing, disconcerting passages and carry the production to the farthest border—to the edge of a horrific nightmare. I'm not sure if the author himself knew where to lead them from there.

Both *The Battle* and *Familiar Faces, Mixed Feelings* were invited to a new 'Playwrights' Festival', *Stücke '76* at the Mülheimer Theatre Days, set for the first week of May. The festival put the accent on the author and new plays produced in the last season, among them Franz Xavier Kroetz's *Das Nest* (*The Nest*), Wolfgang Bauer's *Magnetküsse* (*Magnet Kisses*), Alfred Bergmann's *Nina+ Georg: When the Music's Over*, Peter Hacks's *Das Jahrmarktfest zu Plundersweilern*, and Martin Walser's *Das Sauspiel* (*The Sow Game*). The Strauss and Walser plays could not be presented due to staging problems, a difficulty altogether understandable on the German theatre scene (Klaus Michael Grüber's production of *Empedocles: Reading Hölderlin* could not make the Berliner Theatertreffen for much the same reasons). Still, it is an unsettling truth that the inconspicuous, but engaged, Mülheimer Theatre Days in the industrial Ruhr outdid the Berliner Theatertreffen in scope and significance by praising the author over the director.

MADRID

BRENDAN HENNESSY

THE most vitally relevant indigenous drama at the moment in this waiting-room called Spain, where the train called Democracy has been further delayed, is Buero Vallejo's *La Doble Historia del Doctor Valmy* (*The Twofold Story of Dr Valmy*), and Manuel Martinez Mediero's *Las Hermanas de Buffalo Bill* (*Buffalo Bill's Sisters*), both of which have been running for three months in Madrid. Dr Valmy had to wait ten years for a relaxation of censorship. A police officer, in a fictitious country, is involved in torturing a prisoner in such a way that he becomes impotent. The policeman also becomes impotent, consults psychiatrist Dr Valmy, who tells him the only cure is to give up his job (loud cheers from the audience), and faces a crisis in his marriage when his wife is forced to face the reality of his job.

Buffalo Bill keeps his two sisters enslaved, chained up when he goes hunting Indians. When he is killed by an Indian arrow their repressed instincts explode into sexual fantasies, or Hollywood-style dreams, or publicity jingles. At times, the comedy styles, in exuberant inventiveness, jostle uneasily together, but the targets are in sharp focus, and the attack on Spanish repressiveness more corrosive than anything else at present in Madrid theatre.

The Lope de Vega Company's production of Calderon's *La Vida es Sueño* (*Life is Dream*), directed by José Tamayo, is beautifully mounted. Tamayo succeeds in his aims of sincerity and clarity, and the philosophy of this great play comes through. But it is at the expense of passion, the whole thing is too solemn and immobile—the actors stand around forlornly, like pieces in an abandoned chess game—and the verse speaking lacks style. 'There is no training for the classics', actors tell me, 'nothing like the Comedie Française, or the German national theatres, or the Royal Shakespeare Company in England'.

We have just seen at the Teatro Nacional Maria Guerrero a confection by Francisco Nieva illustrating the life and times of Mariano José de Larra, journalist and playwright, a martyr of Spanish romanticism, who struggled against a fierce persecution comparable to that of recent Spain, and committed suicide in 1837 at the age of 28. The production is built around a contemporary performance of one of Larra's plays that satirises the bourgeois mentality of the time. That the virtues of such a figure should be rediscovered now, in a National Theatre, where policy is inevitably more circumspect, is a heartening sign.

Most independent theatre groups, like El Tabano, are cooperatives and have had constant trouble with the censors, though they are rarely directly political. El Tabano threw everything—circus, music-hall, satirical review, *commedia dell' arte*—into an adaptation of Gay's *Beggars' Opera*, keeping some of the spirit of both that and Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*. Stanislavsky and Strasberg are behind TEI (Teatro Experimental Independiente), as interpreted by an American William Layton who studied under Meisner and emphasizes improvisation. I saw some intense, agonising rehearsals of an adaptation of *Candide* directed by Carlos Plaza.

The commercial theatre is bedevilled by too many locale owners and impresarios in it only for the money, which then goes into other kinds of business. The lack of dynamism in some productions is due to actors exhausted by 11 or 12 performances a week as well as the pussy-footing texts left by the censors. Actors, even so, in the satirical plays have been threatened with violence by the lunatic fringe of the Right, as have Buero Vallejo and other playwrights. One actress was sent a letter-bomb which fortunately didn't go off, another actress has been threatened for baring her breasts (she is still bravely baring them). As for the independent groups, it is difficult for them to find locales in which theatre is permitted, and they are constantly liable to heavy fines as well as orders to move on.

But the new 'democratic' Spain is being forged, however slowly. There's a rumour that Arrabal poked his head into the waiting room.

Remember Sybil Thorndike

J C TREWIN pays tribute to a great actress

SYBIL THORNDIKE—and it must be said immediately—was a great actress. It is as a great actress that she will be remembered in the records of the English theatre. There is no reason whatever to hedge.

I want to affirm this at once. Because she lived to 93, and in spite of the zest and courage of her private life—which would become inextricably mingled with her public life offstage—there may be somewhere an underlying sense that she was, first of all, a dear old lady.

No phrase does less credit to the 'whirlpool in pure intelligence' (Shaw speaking in quite another context) that was Dame Sybil. She was eternally young and ardent. In the loving candour of much the best book that can ever be written about a famous partnership, John Casson's *Lewis and Sybil,* we recognise her virtues and her graces, the largeness of her mind, her courtesy and her gallantry. Christopher Fry said of her ten years ago: 'Her youth is with her still, playing its light across the generations, reaching the very young . . . and redeeming the time for those who are growing old.'

Nothing there of the 'dear old lady' in the modern equivalent of a chimney-corner. Many of us preserve the sight and sound of Dame Sybil on her offstage occasions. I think of her at the presentation of a drama prize, turning an impromptu speech into cascading fervour; at a wedding reception when, within minutes, she was the intimate friend of a dozen complete strangers; at the opening of a regional theatre exhibition when she began with the cry, 'Let's go to everything we can as often as we can'; and at a theatre, more recently, when the house rose in unaffected tribute as she was helped to her place in the stalls.

People responded to her because she kept through life a torch-lighting enthusiasm. She would have understood Frank Benson when he said: 'Life . . . especially for the artist and actor, is a kind of Lampadephoria in which the runners, swift or slow, short-lived or enduring, pass on the torch, radiant or flickering, from hand to hand.' Maybe, in one sense, Reginald Arkell put this in another way. 'Nobody,' he said, 'is so glad to see anybody as Dame Sybil is to see everybody.' In effect, she carried her torches in bundles. She had no prickling pettiness; she put appreciation before criticism; and she would be appalled to hear of any foolishly sustained malice. I imagine her withering the envious little Crabtrees and Backbites of this world with a glance from her clear blue eyes.

We know this; we are aware of the qualities that must live with Sybil Thorndike's name. Obviously there must have been times when she was less than a saint. It depends on what we mean by a saint, and it is not for me to dogmatise. In my own mind she remains the woman I wrote of two decades ago: 'Crusading always, she has ridden the world as a generous idealist. The eyes smile beneath the broad brow. The voice can swoop upon the sense like the darting finger of a lighthouse.'

That said, let me insist again that Sybil Thorndike was a great actress. The fact must never be lost behind the praise of her character—or the eccentric proposition (where did I see it, for heaven's sake?) that, somehow, sweetness of nature must be wrong. We shy today at using the word 'great': in principle that is a good thing, but I use it unhesitatingly for Dame Sybil. When she was in her late eighties I went to a recital of hers at the Edinburgh Festival; my companion was a most sensitive Hungarian writer (herself a former actress) who had never seen Dame Sybil, and who knew little about her and her English fame. The programme included some Browning, a group of modern poems, a speech from Medea. At the interval my companion said, simply, 'Wonderful!' At the end she was weeping. Certainly the recital had moved us all. Dame Sybil was in pain and bravely overcoming it; for her it was a customary performance with the qualification that her 'customary' meant far more than other people's. She conquered that afternoon because of the power any great player must have: an utter command; the power, from a first word, of holding listeners so that they can neither look at anyone else nor think of anything else. Few people in my fifty years' experience have had the gift. Dame Sybil never lost it. She could be below her best; she could be cast wrongly. But always, when she appeared on the stage, the audience was conscious of a great presence.

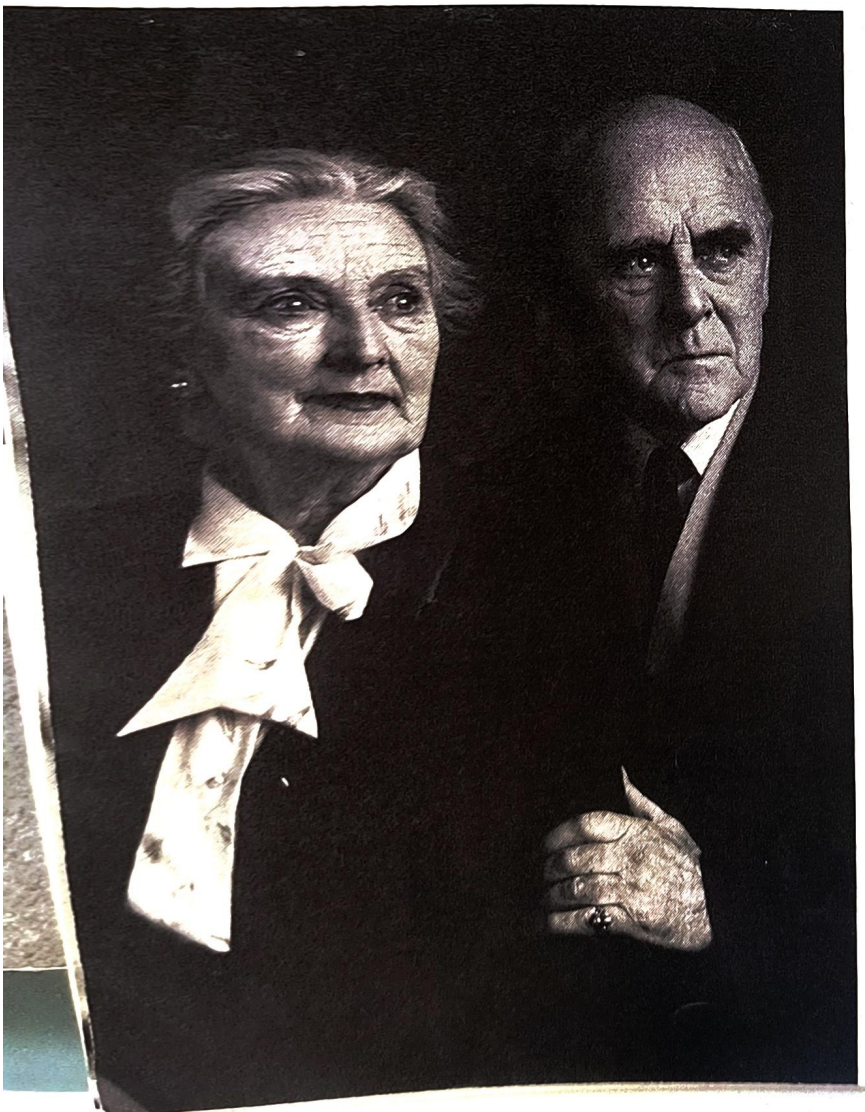
I daresay most playgoers have forgotten her Georgina in *The House of Jeffreys* at the Playhouse just before Christmas 1942: a challenge that only a great actress would have had the enthusiasm and the sense of humour to risk. Sybil Thorndike was as careless about her 'image' as in early days she used to be about her appearance. She had not a hint of pomposity. Now, on being offered the part of an ex-missionary (and descendant of Judge Jeffreys) who was also a cannibal, she seized it with delight. The play was by her brother Russell; in childhood they would act together the wildest box-room melodramas, and *The House of Jeffreys* brought the box-room to the adult stage. Sybil Thorndike played it with a rapt belief that utterly silenced the house. 'The skill and tact of her performance,' wrote James Agate, 'are to be gathered from the fact that we did not laugh at Georgina once.'

In mid-career her main trouble had been over-emphasis bred of over-eagerness, a pleasure in acting that caused her to strike twelve at once and to go on striking it until the effect was lost. She seldom did this in a major play; indeed the only occasion when she seemed to be ill at ease in a major play was as Jocasta in the Old Vic company's *Oedipus* during the mid-forties. In lesser work—for example, a comedy called *Madame Plays Nap*—even she could be defeated now and then by poor writing. She sought too hard to overcome it; during the 1930s she could yield to a restlessness that one day she would shed entirely. Across the years she adapted herself, passed from one skill to another, learnt new disciplines: it was the mark of a great—and a humble—actress.

She was deeply experienced. By the time she reached the West End she had played more parts (on the Ben Greet tours; at the Gaiety, Manchester; at the Old Vic) than most actresses would approach in two lifetimes. She matched a redoubtable spirit with almost complete faith. (I say 'almost' because at the rare moments when she failed to believe in something, her performance sagged). Dame Sybil had the emotional size for tragic acting; the English theatre has known relatively few major tragediennes, but she was in herself an army with banners. Her early recordings show how she could drive to the heart of sorrow.

In the period after the first world war she brought back Greek tragedy (I am not going to condemn Gilbert Murray's versions compared with those of his desperately untheatrical successors); she exercised herself in Grand Guignol, the kind of game-playing she loved; and she had the courage to re-create Beatrice Cenci. Later, Saint Joan: the strength of a peasant girl divinely possessed, a 'dear child of God', a warrior saint in a world not yet ready to receive her. Joan, as Sybil Thorndike saw her, turned to a pillar of faith and fire: no one will have forgotten the splendour

A 1928 portrait of Sybil Thorndike, shortly after she re-joined the Old Vic company at the Lyric to play Shakespearian parts including Katherine, Portia and Beatrice
Photograph: Paul Tanqueray



of her belief. Yet again: belief. It is what the theatre needs; it is what great acting needs; it is what today we all need. Long ago, too, a critic said that the masters of English are 'those who have received the admonition, *Cantate Domino!* They sing a new song unto the Lord.' In *Saint Joan* Shaw sang that new song, and so did Sybil Thorndike: then, and forever, the Maid. 'If Joan lived today,' she said, 'I would follow her without question.' Who for a moment can doubt it?

She began as primarily a tragedienne. She would become a mistress of the domestic play. Though always, and properly, historians will applaud her as a tragic actress, they will not fail to mark her single-minded school-teacher in Emlyn Williams's *The Corn Is Green*; her calm dignity as the woman alone with her thoughts in the country guest-house of *Waters of the Moon*; and, in Priestley's *The Linden Tree,* the sympathy she won for a wife so alien to herself. Ivor Brown (first critic of her time) said that in Dame Sybil's later performances 'the decent humdrum of our lives, so difficult to make appealing on the stage, acquired the radiance of romance and the emotional pressure of a great adventure.' She said herself: 'I want to be lots of different people. Isn't that what acting's meant to be?'

I would like to choose three performances. One, little known, was Lady Randolph in Home's all-but-lost eighteenth-century melodrama of *Douglas* at the Edinburgh Festival in 1950: a part that Siddons created and that Dame Sybil—directed by her son John Casson—recaptured. It was acting in the grand manner with no trace of ancient theatrics, superfluous flamboyance. I wrote of 'a vocal tide of emotion that swept us off as a quick-running but quietly-pouring flood fills a sandy bay on a night of autumn', and of 'the searching utterance that pursues every word, lets no vowel escape it, slurs nothing, flashes up the sense.' Those audiences at Edinburgh were overcome by a heart and mind in grief, the lament over the body of Douglas. By dreary chance a printers' strike had temporarily obscured the newspapers. Too few people have heard today of Dame Sybil's extraordinary achievement.

Better known was Volumnia in the supplication to Laurence Olivier's Coriolanus (Old Vic, 1938). At the words,

> Come, let us go . . .
> I am hush'd until our city be afire,
> And then I'll speak a little

the cutting edge of Dame Sybil's voice was the sword of Rome. That scene was many light-years from the Farrell-Perry comedy, *Treasure Hunt,* set in the south of Ireland, where Aunt Anna Rose, sedan-chair-bound, wandered benignly through a private world, her voice a warm, moonstruck purr, and her eyes shining at sights none else could see.

So much else. Ever and again the Thorndike voice as most of us remember it. Often it reminded me of John Davidson's lines, 'Like flakes of silver fire/The stars in one great shower came down', and never more than on the morning when Dame Sybil spoke John Masefield's ode at the first stonelaying of the National Theatre: 'Men's passions made a play-thing, and sublime.'

I do not want to exaggerate; but, for many of us this century Sybil Thorndike has been at the core of the English theatre. Remember her, then, while that theatre lives. She was a great actress: why must we hedge? Remember her for her faith and works. Remember Hecuba crying 'Would you be wise, ye cities, fly from war.' Remember Joan standing in the light's last concentration while the hour strikes. Remember the emphasis, that summer day, on Masefield's line, 'Making joy daily bread, and beauty known.' Remember Sybil Thorndike, on the last night of the Old Vic company, standing on the Waterloo Road stage and thinking aloud of nearly fifty years.

Though her ashes rest in the Abbey, the spirit we knew endures. 'If I take the wings of the morning and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there also shall Thy hand lead me; and Thy right hand shall hold me.'

Two portraits of Dame Sybil with her husband and mentor, Lewis Casson who died, also aged 93, in 1969; theirs was a marriage committed to new forms of theatre, the left, and each other.

Photographs: Angus McBean and Allan Chappelow

SMALL CHANGE

by Peter Gill

Act 1

SMALL CHANGE *received its world premiere at the Royal Court, London, on 8 July 1976. Directed by* PETER GILL, *designed by* WILLIAM DUDLEY, *lighting by* GARETH JONES, *it had the following cast:*

Gerard ..... JAMES HAZELDINE
Mrs Harte ..... JUNE WATSON
Vincent ..... PHILIP JOSEPH
Mrs Driscoll ..... MARJORIE YATES

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GERARD: It was clean. I make that up. But it was. I'll make it up. It was clean. Distempered walls with a paper border, an oval mirror, oil cloth, a negro money box, picture of the King. . . . In the other house everything was worse. The smell was worse. Medals of grease on the rugs. Tea leaves and bits and leavings outside the drain etc. . . . And there was a garden front and back. Two photographs show that. And I know there were roses. In one photograph, a woman standing in front of the house. In one of the photographs, a woman is standing behind an iron gate on the path in front of the house, with this bundle, this child, in this young scowling woman's arms. Thick ankles, strap shoes, a pinafore, cropped hair . . .

MRS HARTE: We were all young, with young families, and you could walk over the tide field to the channel. Cut a few sandwiches for the children's tea and then when the men come home, they'd walk over and we'd all stroll back together. I don't know what we moved for. Three bedrooms and a front room, and that was empty very nigh eighteen months with nothing kept in it but the bike. There was an air strip over there during the war. I used to stand in the landing window waiting for the siren to go, and look out, nursing you old fashioned style, if I was in the house by myself. Do you remember the German plane that made a landing here? I never had such a fright in all my life. Then after that they built a big wind tunnel there. That was an awful noise too. Rover cars have got it now, I'm told. Uncle picked coal over there when he was a child. You ask him. On the foreshore next to Guest Keen's. You ask him about the time he was over there with Jimmy Harrington, when my mother thought they were lost and went looking for them. And when she found them she leathered them all the way home with their wet stockings. What? Oh, he was a lovely boy, Jimmy Harrington. Oh, he really was. He was lost at sea. The war finished me off. It started everything, and it ended everything.

VINCENT: There was a wind when I turned the corner, blowing down the main road. There was no one in front of me. It was nearly dark. Blokes from the steel works, all covered in red dust, passed me on their way home, pedalling very hard and slow against the wind. Everything went red as they tipped slag onto the foreshore. When they do that, suddenly, without a sound, the sky goes red. It was a cold night, aye, but I was soon at the corner of the street. I slung my coat over the bannisters and went into the living room. Across the backs, lights through the curtains made the windows different colours. I turned on the wireless and sat down to take my boots off, putting them by the sofa. My dinner was on a saucepan being kept warm for me in the kitchen. I brought my plate in with a cloth and moved my place into the middle of the table, starting to eat before I was sat down. The potatoes were scorching. I was finished in no time. I wiped my plate clean with a bit of bread and pushed the plate away from me. Cor, the potatoes had beeen so hot they'd nearly burned me. Phew. I got up from the table and sat on the sofa. I didn't want to be too near the fire. I fancied a cup of tea but I felt too full, from eating too quick. And too tired after work. I switched the radio over and then I switched it off. Through the wall, I could hear the wireless next door playing dance music. I went outside, to the outside toilet. When I come back I could see next door's curtains weren't drawn. The music was so loud you could hear it out there. A little boy about . . . I don't know . . . must have been about . . . I could see him in the room dancing to the music, all by himself, like a little girl. . . . No, not like a little girl. He was just like a little boy. I watched him in the cold. It was too.

GERARD: He was sitting opposite me. He sat sprawled, legs apart, nursing a bottle of Irish whisky inside his shirt, next to his chest. I look like my mother in every way except for her hair, he said. You've got it. He lent forward, grabbing. Where did you get it, he said. Oh Jesus . . . I told him.

VINCENT: I eased the middle of the banked up fire open to see its red inside and to encourage it to burn its covering of small coal. Hung over it, poker in my hand, I destroyed shapes that the burning coal was making, watched it forming a new mass, and then destroyed that. I tested my forearm, holding it before the heat. The wireless next door was still playing. I was hot. I wondered whether or not to let the fire die down. Someone had built it up to keep it in.

MRS HARTE: The war finished me off. It started everything and it ended everything.

GERARD: Whose face did my grin start on? On what face will it end? I seek desperately to find resemblances—her eyes there, her manner there, her punishing unacknowledged defensive aah . . . Did a woman ever live who wasn't slowly killing herself, smoothing her backside lightly as if going to sit down and saying I'm all bleeding?

MRS DRISCOLL: Your legs get cold just nipping across the back like that. I'll have to go.

MRS HARTE: Sit down, you've only just come in.

MRS DRISCOLL: No I can't.

MRS HARTE: Come on, sit down.

MRS DRISCOLL: I mustn't be long. Oh, I don't know what to do with myself.

MRS DRISCOLL: I don't know what I'm going to do, I really don't. (*She weeps bitterly.*)

MRS HARTE: There we are.

MRS DRISCOLL: I kept our Eileen home. She's taken him out. Michael has gone down our Julie's.

MRS HARTE: Will you have a cup of tea?

MRS DRISCOLL: No, I can't stay.

MRS HARTE: You feel bad?

MRS DRISCOLL: I feel really bad. I'm in the middle of black-leading the grate. I can't even work it off. He can be so nice when he wants. He was out till gone quarter to twelve last night. I don't know where he could have been to that time. He was ever so abusive when I asked him. He stood in that doorway there, in that overcoat, awful unsteady. He wouldn't say. He never does.

MRS HARTE: I wouldn't give him the pleasure of asking. I should have been in bed, if it were me. You must want your head read, waiting up to that time.

MRS DRISCOLL: It's no good, I can't go

Production Note

When Peter Gill's production of *Small Change* opened at the Royal Court on 8 July, it was played on a 24-foot square, steeply raked stage in which the gradient was 1:8. The stage was constructed of plywood shattering board which came from a building site and was cantilevered so that, when lit, it appeared to be floating. In order to avoid being overly austere, the surface of the floor was painted with a collage of images suggestive of the atmosphere of the play.

to sleep if I'm in bed on my own. And then when he's in that state I can't go to sleep either.

MRS HARTE: Let mine lie by me drunk, he'd be on the oilcloth in the morning.

MRS DRISCOLL: He hung his coat on a hook in the passage and nearly £20 fell out of it.

MRS HARTE: I hope it's in yours now.

MRS DRISCOLL: Oh, I couldn't.

MRS HARTE: You should have snaffled it. How would he know? Drunken old bugger.

MRS DRISCOLL: Oh, I couldn't.

MRS HARTE: Well of all the silly, soft . . . How would he ever know? He could have lost it anywhere.

MRS DRISCOLL: I wouldn't be able to carry it off.

MRS HARTE: The two-timing, bloody, conniving old git. He wants a good kicking.

MRS DRISCOLL: I don't think you should say that kind of thing.

MRS HARTE: Well I wouldn't invite it then.

MRS DRISCOLL: I'd better be going. I'm all on edge. You won't say anything? I'm sorry. I don't know what to do. Honestly, Mrs Harte, I wish I could pack it all in.

MRS HARTE: Eh, eh, eh, eh. That's enough of that.

MRS DRISCOLL: The house is getting me down. I can't keep up with it.

MRS HARTE: Well may God forgive you.

MRS DRISCOLL: Do you know, I never used to suffer like that. Do you know, once upon a time I never knew what it was to miss a night's sleep. Now it's like hell on earth.

MRS HARTE: I know. I generally sleep alright, I must say. If I don't, it's like hell itself.

MRS DRISCOLL: I lie there. I've got this habit of clenching my hands. And sweating. I can't keep still. But you have to when he has to be up so early. It's all my fault. It's my fault. I think it's my fault, see.

MRS HARTE: What is?

MRS DRISCOLL: It *is*. Do you know . . . Well, you know Mrs Harte I never . . . you know . . . I never went out with anyone before I met John. Well not . . . You know.

MRS HARTE: I should hope not.

MRS DRISCOLL: The windows all need cleaning. I cleaned the mirror once today. Now there's finger marks all over it again.

MRS HARTE: Well what does that matter?

MRS DRISCOLL: The children's shoes all need mending. He mends them usually. We've got a last.

MRS HARTE: Won't he do them then?

MRS DRISCOLL: Yes, only I don't know *when* he's going to do them. I just wish they was done. It's all a mess, wherever you look. You finish something. You turn around and nothing's been done. And you notice everything. I get up, I think another day.

MRS HARTE: Blimey, who doesn't think that. Here goes another day. Let's get 'em all out of it. Let's have a sit down. That's the way I think. It's wrong, I know. And then when they're gone, I get lonely. But as soon as they're in again I think, Oh, Christ, why don't you all go out and leave me alone.

MRS DRISCOLL: I'm alright, when I start working. If I can just get through it. I don't know. It's wicked—to feel like this, isn't it? Don't you think? It must be, I think.

MRS HARTE: What in the name of Jesus is wicked about it?

MRS DRISCOLL: Oh it is. And I used to be ever such a good manager.

MRS HARTE: Oh, don't talk so soft. Don't you think everyone feels like that, I do.

MRS DRISCOLL: And I think I'm late.

MRS HARTE: Oh now my God almighty. Are you sure?

MRS DRISCOLL: Yes. No. I don't know. I'm not certain sure.

MRS HARTE: Well then.

MRS DRISCOLL: I'm pretty sure.

MRS HARTE: Can you tell?

MRS DRISCOLL: Generally.

MRS HARTE: Well you're lucky. I never can. How long?

MRS DRISCOLL: I don't know.

MRS HARTE: Well we'll hope.

MRS DRISCOLL: Yes.

MRS HARTE: Dear dear, I dunno.

MRS DRISCOLL: I'll have to go in, it's the rent man today.

MRS HARTE: I know.

MRS DRISCOLL: I owe him three weeks.

MRS HARTE: Well I don't know what I'm going to do. I think I'll be ready for the hurry up wagon at this rate.

MRS DRISCOLL: Oh, Mrs Harte, I wish he loved me.

MRS HARTE: Don't be silly, of course he does.

MRS DRISCOLL: I think he does in his way—do you?

MRS HARTE: Don't be silly, of course he does. (*As though it was upsetting*) Come on now, you're a young woman.

MRS DRISCOLL: If only he'd love me I'd be alright. I would. I don't care about the kids, that's the God's truth and I can't help it, I can't. I've only got any feeling for him, isn't it awful, only him. I don't want anything else in the whole world. I wish the kids were dead and me with them. It's half killing me. I followed him into town last Saturday. I left the kids with our Vincent. He's a good kid. He went right into the Park Hotel.

MRS HARTE: The mean old sod. Did you go in after him?

MRS DRISCOLL: I couldn't. I didn't have no stockings on. I only had a pair of our Eileen's school socks on, I just went out on the spur. Put my coat on over my pinafore. Who does he go to meet in a place like that?

MRS HARTE: Which bar did he go in?

MRS DRISCOLL: I don't know.

MRS HARTE: Well you were soft. I expect he just went in for a drink. You're making too much of it. You don't give yourself the chance to think about anything else. You should get out more. There's the baby.

MRS DRISCOLL: I'll have to go in.

MRS HARTE: He'll be alright.

MRS DRISCOLL: No, I'd better go in.

MRS HARTE: Come and have a lie down in here for the afternoon.

MRS DRISCOLL: No, I'll have to get the tea on.

MRS HARTE: Oh, don't mind the tea, come in here.

MRS DRISCOLL: No, no, I'm feeling a bit better now. Thanks.

MRS HARTE: Well, bang the wall if you want me.

VINCENT: She used to sit rubbing her ankles, pulling the curl out of her hair, and straightening it behind her ears. She used to sit as if she was warming herself. She used to sit reading her woman's paper. She used to sit, crying, bitter.

MRS DRISCOLL: I have been in worse states and I must have faith that I'll get through this one and so on for better or worse, and that the end will be better or worse. But it will be different. Being the end.

GERARD: Over the tidefield. Past dismantled allotments. Currant bushes run to seed with flowers growing in them from seed blown into them. Bits of the war. Targets. Gun posts. The sand pit. The cinder track ends in turf. Pull up a tuft of coarse grass to see if there's a curlew nest. Nothing there. That's where they lay eggs. Lie by the river. Steep, gleaming mud. Wide empty river and then in no time a full tide, swilling, catching the sun. Lie, looking up to catch a skylark. River at full flood. Slip into it. Cattle marooned on the grass island. Afraid to swim that far. Duck and float. Slide out onto the turf, and lie, hoping to catch a skylark. Then walking fast, skirting the marsh, cracking the salty reeds, walk along the trenches, cut to drain the whole field, until at last the estuary. The grasses on the bank laden with sand like snow. Watch its spread. And then the channel. The sea catching everything, swallowing everything, taking everything with it and just leaving behind a coarse rim of gritty soil. Sky goes red. When they tip slag on the foreshore, the whole place floods red. Bright weather again. Back to streets.

MRS HARTE: Where have you been?

GERARD: Over the tide.

MRS HARTE: You wanna be careful.

GERARD: Yeah.

MRS HARTE: You been swimming?

GERARD: I had a dip.

MRS HARTE: Oh don't.

VINCENT: It's alright, it's me.

MRS DRISCOLL: Is that you?

VINCENT: What?

MRS DRISCOLL: Is that you?

VINCENT: Yes. Where's the kids? Where's Eileen? What's the matter?

MRS DRISCOLL: Nothing. Where have you been?

VINCENT: There is. Mam? What's the matter? Where is everybody?

MRS DRISCOLL: Shut up. She's taken them out.

VINCENT: What's the matter then?

MRS DRISCOLL: Where have you been?
VINCENT: What is it, Mam? Come on, tell us.
MRS DRISCOLL: Where have you been?
VINCENT: I been for a swim. What's the matter?
MRS DRISCOLL: Where?
VINCENT: What is it?
MRS DRISCOLL: Where have you been?
VINCENT: Over the tide. Over the tide. Alright? I been for a swim. The tide's in.

MRS HARTE: Where have you been?
GERARD: Out.
MRS HARTE: I know you been out. Where out?
GERARD: Over the East dock, for a swim.
MRS HARTE: Oh, don't, it's so dangerous.

MRS DRISCOLL: Have you been swimming?
VINCENT: Yeah.
MRS DRISCOLL: Have you been over the dock? Have you? You wait till your father comes in.

GERARD: I been over the tide.
MRS HARTE: I know, your hair's wet. Was the tide up? Was it? Eh?
GERARD: Of course it was.
MRS HARTE: I wish I had a paper, I'd look. Was it?
GERARD: Yes, I said.
MRS HARTE: It better have been.

GERARD: Where you going?
VINCENT: I got to go in.
GERARD: Oh.
VINCENT: Where YOU going?
GERARD: I got to go in.
VINCENT: Well, what's the matter with you then? Eh? Mmmm?
GERARD: I'm going in then. OK. OK.
VINCENT: Alright then, go in.
GERARD: You going in?
VINCENT: Yeah.
GERARD: I got to have my tea.
VINCENT: Alright then.
GERARD: Call for us later then.
VINCENT: OK.
GERARD: Don't forget. Vincent. Vincent!
VINCENT: I won't forget. Go on. I'll see you later.
GERARD: Where you going? I thought you was going in?
VINCENT: I got to do my paper round first.
GERARD: You've done your paper round.
VINCENT: I haven't. I didn't do it.
GERARD: Do you want me to come with you then?
VINCENT: No. I'm not doing it.
GERARD: Why not?
VINCENT: I don't feel like it. Alright? Anyway, I'm packing it in.
GERARD: Where you going then?
VINCENT: I don't know. I thought you had to go in. Go on, I'll see you later.
GERARD: No you won't.
VINCENT: Alright then. What's the matter with you? Eh? Mmm? Alright then.
GERARD: Nothing's the matter with me.
VINCENT: Well then, go in then.
GERARD: I am going in.
VINCENT: I'm going in an' all.

GERARD: Don't go in.
VINCENT: I got to.
GERARD: And me.
VINCENT: I'll see you later.
GERARD: Aye. Don't forget.

MRS DRISCOLL: Vincent!

MRS HARTE: Come here, let me look at you. Come here. Why are your shorts buttoned like that? Where have you been?
GERARD: Out playing.
MRS HARTE: I know. Where have you been?
GERARD: Out the back. Down the shelter.
MRS HARTE: Who with?
GERARD: With Vincent.
MRS HARTE: Come here.
GERARD: No.
MRS HARTE: Come here.
GERARD: (*giggling*) No.
MRS HARTE: Come here, till I split you. What were you doing? Come here.
GERARD: Playing.
MRS HARTIE: Come here.
GERARD: (*giggling*) No.
MRS HARTE: Wait till I catch hold of you.
GERARD: With Vincent.
MRS HARTE: Come here. Gerard.
GERARD: I'm going out. Tara.
MRS HARTE: Gerard.

VINCENT: Gerard.
GERARD: What?
VINCENT: Got any?
GERARD: What?
VINCENT: Seen any nests?
GERARD: I'm stuck.
VINCENT: What d'you mean?
GERARD: Are you stuck?
VINCENT: Of course I'm not stuck. What do you mean stuck? How can you be stuck? I've just stopped, that's all.
GERARD: Don't look down. I'm stuck.
VINCENT: What? Blimey. Come down, come down.
GERARD: I can't.
VINCENT: Oh, blimey.
GERARD: Don't come up.
VINCENT: Blimey. Well climb on up. Go on.
GERARD: I can't.
VINCENT: Well, come on down.
GERARD: I can't.
VINCENT: Blimey. It was you went up there. You went up there. What do you want to go up there for?
GERARD: Don't look down.
VINCENT: Why not? (*He looks down*) Blimey!
GERARD: Here's the dock coppers.
VINCENT: Oh Christ. Come on. Come down.
GERARD: I can't.

GERARD: Or earlier. Lost, crawling up the beach, under the legs of tethered beach ponies. Short beaten horses. Shore, ribbed like the roof of a huge mouth. The grey sea fiilling abandoned holes. Ma ma ma Mam.
MRS HARTE: What have you got there? What have you got in your hand? Come on . . . give it to me. Sweet paper. Throw it down. I'll slap you hard. Here, hold my bag.

VINCENT: You coming over the field, Ger?
GERARD: No, I can't.
VINCENT: Why not?
GERARD: I can't get through the barbed wire.
VINCENT: Yes you can. Come on.

MRS DRISCOLL: Where have you been?

GERARD: Perhaps I'd been over the park, or into town, or with Vincent, or out, or lying under the tree. Or down the field, lying under the tree, eating banana sandwiches or hanging about or deliberately wasting time, deliberately creating tedium. Or over the park, having squeezed through the railings rather than go through the gate, and having squeezed through the railings, climbed up and sat on the railway embankment, above the bushes and birch trees, and looked down onto the soccer pitches and having walked along the line above the playground, sat above the other pitches and seen the whole plan of the park. Or gone for a swim in the park baths. Through the green turnstile, hoping for a single cubicle, to avoid other boys. Boys changing in cubicles without doors. Boys with lamed legs. Boys flicking towels. Afraid to stand near the deep end, for fear of being pushed in. Grazed knee on the concrete of the pool. Was the sting from the chlorine or the concrete grazing the skin off? Polio scares. Or over the playground. Sometimes the swings are wrapped round the top of the supports by the big boys, youths, thugs, Teds, youths, roughs, vandals now. Swinging, frightened someone will push you so high that you have to jump off or it's too late and you are afraid to jump off. There's a moment when the swing stops, in a curious kind of gulp in the chain. You could go so high could swing right over and crash down. The older boys are standing on the seats, girls sitting between them, between their legs and feet, bending at the knees to get an impetus to swing higher. The Parkie driving them away. Cheeking him. Hooligan. I forgot.

VINCENT: Do you want a lift, Gerard?
MRS HARTE: You're not giving him a lift. I've told you two before. About that. On the handle bars. I saw you.
VINCENT: Only on the bar, Mrs Harte.
MRS HARTE: No.
GERARD: No, you go on. I'm not going this afternoon.
MRS HARTE: What did you say?
GERARD: You heard.
MRS HARTE: What did you say?
GERARD: You heard that, too.
MRS HARTE: Come here, I'll cleave you, you little git.
GERARD: I'm not feeling well. I can't go back.
MRS HARTE: On your way. And you, Vincent. Off you go.

GERARD: I'm not going.
MRS HARTE: You are.
GERARD: I'm not.
MRS HARTE: Oh oh, but you are.
GERARD: Oh, but I'm not.
MRS HARTE: Now, get your blazer.
GERARD: I feel sick.
MRS HARTE: So do I. Where is it?
GERARD: Blazer!
MRS HARTE: That's a nice blazer.
GERARD: You wear it, then.
MRS HARTE: Come here.
VINCENT: I'm going, then.
GERARD: Yeah. You go on.
MRS HARTE: He's coming now, Vincent. Get your blazer. Now get it.
GERARD: I don't know where it is.
MRS HARTE: Find it. Upstairs.
GERARD: It isn't upstairs.
VINCENT: I'm going then.
MRS HARTE: I'm not writing you a note, so don't think I am.
GERARD: That's OK by me.
MRS HARTE: You're a hateful kid.
VINCENT: Tara.
GERARD: Anyway I'm leaving.
MRS HARTE: I wish you could bloody leave. The sooner the better. But you're not leaving. Right. Dear dear. You'd better go, Vincent.
VINCENT: Tara then.
GERARD: What's the matter?
VINCENT: I'm going then.
GERARD: What's the matter?
MRS HARTE: Nothing's the matter. I'm sick of you, that's all, you little swine. I am. Honest to God, I am. You're tiring me out.
GERARD: Alright, I'll go.
MRS HARTE: I don't care if you do go.
GERARD: Alright, I'm not going.
MRS HARTE: And I'm not writing you a note.
GERARD: Don't worry, I'll write one myself.
MRS HARTE: Oh, Jesus, help me with this swine of a kid.
GERARD: Look at it.
MRS HARTE: What?
GERARD: All of it. In here. Out there. The street. I'm fed up. I'm fed up.
MRS HARTE: You're fed up. That's a laugh. You're bloody fed up. A kid of your age. I'm fed up to the back teeth, I am.
GERARD: *And* I'm bored.
MRS HARTE: Bored. What you bored with, then? Eh? Eh?
GERARD: Oh, nothing, nothing. I'm going.
MRS HARTE: Where?
GERARD: Oh, I don't know. School.
MRS HARTE: You'd better run for it then.

GERARD: Or perhaps I'd been over the park, seen the old man with his plastic shopping bag and sandwiches for his favourite children. Or gone down the other end, the nice end, with the dilapidated tennis courts and garden and bowling green fielding old men with flannels and cream jackets and rubber over shoes, with their rubber mats. Boring, unavoidable, glimpses of peace, with their gardens and allotments, pipes. Steady unendurable visions of their perfect lives. Gardens, cars, good sense, polished furniture, kindliness. Their dullness and their humour killing me. Clerks in the Inland Revenue, with established posts or perhaps retired, with daughters and a son with a car. Holidays, two weeks. Rockeries, kindly good sense. Delivered papers. *Everybodies, News Chronicle, Herald, Reynolds News*? Hardly. Perhaps. Radio with pleated silk, backing the fretwork. Anonymous, once pretty wives. With their prudence and irritating passions and have been in the war.

MRS DRISCOLL: Aren't you going out, Vincent? Vincent?
VINCENT: No.
MRS DRISCOLL: Don't you have to go to church tonight?
GERARD: Don't forget I'm on the altar tonight, Mam. Mam.
VINCENT: No.
MRS HARTE: What?
GERARD: Don't forget, will you?
MRS HARTE: (*imitating his whine*) Don't forget.
MRS DRISCOLL: Well don't sulk in here, Vincent.
GERARD: I wants a clean cottar mind.
MRS HARTE: Do you? Well you can want on.
GERARD: Or, Mam.
MRS DRISCOLL: Stop spitting, Vincent. There's a good boy. It's a terrible habit you've got. Are you sure you're not meant to be going to church?
GERARD: Mam.
MRS HARTE: You had it clean on on Sunday. Anyway, you didn't bring it home in time.
GERARD: I did. I brought it home yesterday.
MRS HARTE: Yesterday.
GERARD: Well, will you iron it then?
MRS HARTE: No, I won't bloody iron it. On your way.
MRS DRISCOLL: It's Wednesday night, Vincent. I'm sure you're supposed to be in church.
MRS HARTE: And I'm not washing any more football gear either. Right.
GERARD: Right.
MRS HARTE: You cheeky. Come here. Come here, till I kill you.
MRS DRISCOLL: Vincent.
VINCENT: Oh Christ. I'm going out.
MRS DRISCOLL: What did you say? Vincent.
VINCENT: Tara.
MRS DRISCOLL: Vincent, what did you say? Vincent!
MRS HARTE: Come here.
MRS DRISCOLL: Vincent!
MRS HARTE: There's Vincent. Come in, Vincent. You going to benediction? If you are I hope you're in a better frame of mind than him.
VINCENT: No.
MRS HARTE: I bet he doesn't keep on about clean cottars.
GERARD: Why don't you do a swop?
MRS HARTE: I wish to Christ I could.
GERARD: Anyway, he doesn't need a clean cottar, that's why.
MRS HARTE: Because he keeps his clean, I should think.
GERARD: No, clever, he got chucked off.
MRS HARTE: Get out he never did, did you, Vincent? What for?
GERARD: His face don't fit.
MRS HARTE: Now. Shut it, you. There's favouritism down there. Right through the bloody parish. Nice Catholics some of them are.
GERARD: That's what I said.
MRS HARTE: I'll do for you in a minute.
GERARD: Come on. Come on.
MRS HARTE: Now stop it.
GERARD: Come on.
MRS HARTE: Go on, go on. Get out, get out. Ooh, I've hurt my arm now.
GERARD: Have you? Come on. What's the matter?
MRS HARTE: I'm not talking to you.
GERARD: Why not?
MRS HARTE: You've got no respect. Go on the pair of you.
GERARD: Where you going?
VINCENT: I'll walk down with you.
MRS HARTE: And don't you be late. Do you hear?
GERARD: We're going for chips.
MRS HARTE: You are not.
GERARD: Tara.
MRS HARTE: Do you hear me?
VINCENT: Let's go down the park.
GERARD: The gate'll be shut.
VINCENT: Let's go over the warmies.
GERARD: Or. No.
VINCENT: Let's go over the whitewashed wall.
GERARD: What for?
VINCENT: I don't know.
GERARD: Let's go over the park.
VINCENT: Come on then. We'll climb over. Come on.
GERARD: No. The parkie'll see us.
VINCENT: No he won't. We'll climb over.
GERARD: I can't.
VINCENT: We'll squeeze through. You're skinny enough.

GERARD: The afternoon was. It's evening anyway, almost very near. The afternoon. It was evening, it was evening. Late afternoon. Got out of bed. This is intolerable. And picked up a milk bottle. Stop. Went round the room collecting up milk bottles, pouring all the milk I found, in one. 'Ere that's gone off, phew, I'm not surprised. There. Took a bottle of white medicine off the mantelpiece, uncorked it and took a swig. No. I put it back. There was nothing outside the window and nothing when I opened the door. If I smoked I could be lighting another cigarette, finger shaking, holding the cigarette and a cup of coffee in the one hand. Laid my head on the table. Don't go to sleep. Picked up my trousers off the floor and put them on. There we are. I wish I hadn't done that. I sat down and put my head on the table again. Where was I? You're dying, talking, experience hoarded is death. Thou shalt not take to thyself any graven thing nor the likeness of anything which is in the Heavens above or in the earth beneath. Thou shalt not adore them nor serve them.

MRS HARTE: I could lend you ten bob.
GERARD: Thanks, that'll be fine.
MRS HARTE: Now I want that back remember?
GERARD: Don't you always?
MRS HARTE: You got me heart scalded. Why don't you settle down? Job to job. What do you do up there anyway?
GERARD: What I do up there is I walk the streets.
MRS HARTE: You'll come to grief.
GERARD: I have quite literally.
MRS HARTE: What have you got to be sorry for?
GERARD: That's it.
MRS HARTE: You ought to have my worries.
GERARD: I do.
MRS HARTE: I wish I could afford . . .
GERARD: Money money money.
MRS HARTE: You'll be the finish of me. You will.
GERARD: You'll see to that, won't you?
MRS HARTE: Honest to my God, isn't it terrible?
GERARD: Sorry. Sorry. Sorry.
MRS HARTE: If anyone's heart is broke it's mine.
GERARD: Don't start.
MRS HARTE: He was ill and I couldn't go up to him. Others went. I couldn't. I knew he wouldn't mind. No one expected me to by then, anyway. Then he died. Oh well.

VINCENT: Where is he?
MRS DRISCOLL: Who?
VINCENT: Him.
MRS DRISCOLL: I don't know.
VINCENT: Hum.
MRS DRISCOLL: Gone for a drink—don't ask me.
VINCENT: Where's my dinner?
MRS DRISCOLL: Sit down, don't panic, it'll be here.
VINCENT: I haven't got long.
MRS DRISCOLL: I know. I bet it's cold on the dock today.
VINCENT: It is.
MRS DRISCOLL: Did you see your father down there this morning?
VINCENT: Aye. Only for a second.
MRS DRISCOLL: I wonder when he'll be in.
VINCENT: (*yawning*) I don't know. That's what I said.
MRS DRISCOLL: What's the matter with you?
VINCENT: What do you mean?
MRS DRISCOLL: You've got 'em on you all of a sudden, haven't you? Come on, sit to the table. Haven't you got a fag?
VINCENT: No.
MRS DRISCOLL: What did you do with the five I bought you yesterday?
VINCENT: Smoked 'em haven't I.
MRS DRISCOLL: Well I don't know what a boy of your age wants smoking for any road.
VINCENT: No?
MRS DRISCOLL: What's up?
VINCENT: I don't know.
MRS DRISCOLL: There's something up.
VINCENT: No there isn't.
MRS DRISCOLL: If it's about finishing your time, you're finishing it, your time.
VINCENT: Well, I'm not finishing my time.
MRS DRISCOLL: You are finishing your time.
VINCENT: I'm not finishing my time.
MRS DRISCOLL: Vincent, don't, my nerves are bad this morning. You have to work your time. Don't be silly. Vincent.
VINCENT: Well I'm not. I'm sick of not having any money. Aren't you? Don't you want more money?
MRS DRISCOLL: Yes.
VINCENT: And I'm sick of having it thrown in my face.
MRS DRISCOLL: What?
VINCENT: Not bringing much money in. It's not my fault.
MRS DRISCOLL: Who said it was? What a think to say. When did I throw it up at you, Vincent? What an awful thing to say.
VINCENT: Well?
MRS DRISCOLL: When?
VINCENT: Friday. Last Friday you did. Practically every Friday. Well. I'm packing it in. It's a big fiddle anyway.
MRS DRISCOLL: What is?
VINCENT: Down there. I know the trade. Well I practically do. I can do as good a job as most fellas any road. Except for one or two of them.
MRS DRISCOLL: You don't know how lucky you are, that's your trouble. How many boys have got a trade? Tell me that.
VINCENT: How many wants one?
MRS DRISCOLL: Don't be silly.
VINCENT: It's bloody antique.
MRS DRISCOLL: What did you say?
VINCENT: It's antique. The yard is practically at a standstill. It's an antique system anyway, having to be put in for a trade. It's all a fiddle.
MRS DRISCOLL: How's it a fiddle?
VINCENT: What? It's not a fiddle you keeping me on practically nothing for seven years, while they get free labour and skilled work, and then a skilled man at the end of it?
MRS DRISCOLL: Don't talk so stupid.
VINCENT: It's true.
MRS DRISCOLL: Well, if you want to look at it that way.
VINCENT: That's the only way to look at it.
MRS DRISCOLL: It's not the only way to look at it. I don't know. I don't see how it's a fiddle. It's a fair exchange to me. Look what your father would have done for a trade, but they were too poor and he had to bring in what he could.
VINCENT: I can get a job doing what I'm doing now.
MRS DRISCOLL: Don't be silly. They want skilled men.
VINCENT: I am a skilled man. I know the trade near as makes no difference.
MRS DRISCOLL: Don't be so big-headed, Vincent. It doesn't become you. You'll have to serve your time. You'll have to have signed indentures. I read it every night in the *Echo*. Only time served men apply.
VINCENT: Not for everything.
MRS DRISCOLL: *You* count yourself lucky.
VINCENT: Why should I?
MRS DRISCOLL: Why should you? Because you are. How many apprentices are there down the Mount Stuart? Go on tell me. And how do you think you're one of them?
VINCENT: Oh go on. That's right. Throw it up.
MRS DRISCOLL: Not through your father, that's for sure.
VINCENT: No, through yours. Go on.
MRS DRISCOLL: My father was a really skilled man, and don't you forget it. Bloody Catholics.
VINCENT: What?
MRS DRISCOLL: Bloody Catholics with your religion and your labour party. You're all voice.
VINCENT: Better than no voice at all. It's a wonder you don't vote like him an' all. I don't think you think you should vote. You don't vote, do you?
MRS DRISCOLL: No. I don't see the point in women voting.
VINCENT: Nor me.
MRS DRISCOLL: I can't bear all this talk. I don't know anything and all I hear is talk. It wears me out.
VINCENT: I'm not just talking, I'm packing it in.
MRS DRISCOLL: Vincent, that's not doing anything.
VINCENT: Well, why don't you do something? Why don't you stand up to him? Why do you pick on me? You just want to be a slave, you do.
MRS DRISCOLL: I never wanted all this. I never came from all this.
VINCENT: What's wrong with it? This is nice. You keep it smashing, mam.
MRS DRISCOLL: I don't want you down them yards. But what say do I have?
VINCENT: Why not? It's great down there. It is.
MRS DRISCOLL: Is it? I don't know. I don't know anything. Except I've heard of boys of fourteen running home because of the awful noise. But it's not for me to know. But I do know it's good to have a trade. You wanted to leave school.
VINCENT: I never did. You made me.
MRS DRISCOLL: We didn't. What good was another year's schooling going to do you, eh? You wanted to leave.
VINCENT: Well, I'm packing it in, alright?
MRS DRISCOLL: Stop it, Vincent, my nerves are awful bad.
VINCENT: You see, you always do that. Why can't you be on my side, Mam. You see. Aaah. It's alright. Don't bother.
MRS DRISCOLL: He's grieving. I'd come if I could, he's grieving. He's never been a scrap of trouble to me, and I'd love to help him. I'd get out of this if I could. It's my fault I know. I'd come if I could.

GERARD: The sun's blinding me.
VINCENT: Well, close your eyes then.
GERARD: I'm testing them.
VINCENT: We ought to go in while the tide's up.
GERARD: I'm too hot. Hey, is that a skylark?
VINCENT: Don't be soft, of course it isn't.
GERARD: Well, what is it then? It's high

enough up.
VINCENT: I don't know what it is. It's not a lark, that I do know.
GERARD: How do you know?
VINCENT: Look, it's not a skylark.
GERARD: Look, the moon's gone in.
VINCENT: Well?
GERARD: I don't know what time it is. I'll get murdered.
VINCENT: Nor me. The pubs are out . . . listen . . . I'll get done.
GERARD: And me. Look.
VINCENT: What?
GERARD: Look up there.
VINCENT: What? What at?
GERARD: Light has the fastest speed, right. Faster than sound.
VINCENT: Of course, it's faster than sound.
GERARD: That's what I said. Look up there then. You looking?
VINCENT: Yeah.
GERARD: I can't see you.
VINCENT: I'm looking.
GERARD: I wish the moon would come out.
VINCENT: Why?
GERARD: Now, take any star.
VINCENT: Is this a card trick?
GERARD: No, listen. Now. A star, x distance from the earth, is, when seen by us, y time in its past. Right?
VINCENT: So what?
GERARD: Do you agree?
VINCENT: Aye.
GERARD: So that the world being x distance from the star would therefore from the star's point of view be y times in its past. Do you agree?
VINCENT: Nah. Well in the idea.
GERARD: So if we were up there, we could be seeing, well, we, we'd be seeing anything. Something in the past, any road.
VINCENT: What?
GERARD: Something. Depends. Something. Pyramids. Anything. Something. A man's life must be in existence for all time. This must be.
VINCENT: What for? What about time, though?
GERARD: What?
VINCENT: Doesn't it have an end?
GERARD: Dunno. I reckon not.
VINCENT: Anyway, that's all just an idea.
GERARD: What do you mean, just an idea?
VINCENT: Well, I can't take it seriously.
GERARD: Why not?
VINCENT: You can't prove it.
GERARD: Of course you can prove it. I just have.
VINCENT: That's you, see. You want an easy solution, so it's all fixed. You can't prove an idea.
GERARD: Of course you can. Of course you can prove an idea. What do you mean you can't prove it?
VINCENT: Prove it then. I'd need evidence.
GERARD: They could prove it.
VINCENT: How?
GERARD: With a machine.
VINCENT: What machine?
GERARD: I don't know. You're supposed to be good with your hands, you ought to be able to think of something.
VINCENT: Well I can get the chain back on my bike without having a breakdown.
GERARD: So can I get the chain back on my bike. I just can't mend a puncture. But I can get the chain back on my bike.
VINCENT: Not without having a nervous breakdown, you can't.
GERARD: It's true though, I bet, what I said.
VINCENT: It's just an idea. They'd need a machine. And if they did make a machine, you couldn't prove it.
GERARD: Why not?
VINCENT: Because human life isn't long enough. You'd be dead before you got there.
GERARD: Not if they got one to go fast enough. Got you.
VINCENT: Nah. They'll get to the moon though. You watch it. Journey into space.
GERARD: They won't, will they?
VINCENT: You don't like that, do you? What's the time then?
GERARD: I don't know.
VINCENT: We'll get done. The moon's out again.
GERARD: Look at it.
VINCENT: What?
GERARD: The sun.
VINCENT: Why?
GERARD: To test your eyes.
VINCENT: What, do you want me to go blind? You're up the wall, you are.
GERARD: Isn't it hot? Coming in?
VINCENT: Nah. Don't you go in either.
GERARD: Why not?
VINCENT: It is a lark and all. Two of them.
GERARD: I'm going in.
VINCENT: The tide's on the turn. Look at it. You can't go in now.
GERARD: I don't care.
VINCENT: Don't be daft, you know how fast it goes out.
GERARD: I'm only going for a dip.
VINCENT: Don't be so bloody daft, Gerard.
GERARD: I'm only going for a dip.
VINCENT: No. Don't be so bloody daft, Gerard.

MRS DRISCOLL: Oh, Mrs Harte, I felt as if I didn't exist. I kept looking out of the window and I couldn't work out how it could be possible. It's easy to say so now, because although I think it, I don't know it, if you can take my meaning. And the line and the line post and everything. Well the truth to tell I got very frightened, so I locked the bedroom door and I lay on the bed, but I couldn't stop my heart thumping. I was really frightened and I got so far down into myself I felt I should never come back and I got into a real fright and I thought I must work this off but I couldn't bear to have the baby near me or to have to talk to our Colin so I slipped right out of the back door. I got down the gully alright, but when I came out on the main road I didn't know where I was and this feeling. Oh my God you wouldn't credit it. I felt as if I was . . . Even now you're here and you're not here. Isn't it dreadful? Oh whatever am I going to do?
MRS HARTE: It's not as if we've got a bit of brandy. It's terrible to be poor.
MRS DRISCOLL: O Jesus . . . Oh dear. (*She laughs.*)
In the street Mr Riley took my arm and I felt a bit better. He's such a gentleman. Do you ever get this feeling? It's awful. It's happening, but how can it be happening? Like I feel as if I'm not here. I feel as if I don't exist at all. How can I exist? Now I'm just saying that. That's what I felt like, I can't go on like this. I'm not going to shout, but it won't go away.
MRS HARTE: Come on, love.
MRS DRISCOLL: Go away.
MRS HARTE: Come on.
MRS DRISCOLL: No.
MRS HARTE: Yes, come on, come on, come on, my love, have a cry.
MRS DRISCOLL: Don't make it worse. I'll settle down, don't worry about me. Oh Oh. I'll have to go back. I can't stand still.
MRS HARTE: You just try.
MRS DRISCOLL: Thank you.
MRS HARTE: Dear, dear, dear. You stay in here. Gerard'll pop in next door and see everything is alright. You come and lie in here, my love.
MRS DRISCOLL: I'm awfully sorry.
VINCENT: Is my mother in here?
MRS DRISCOLL: Yes. I won't be long. Go on. Isn't it terrible. Vincent!
MRS HARTE: Hello, Vincent.
MRS DRISCOLL: Go on. I'll be in in a minute.
VINCENT: They want their tea.
MRS DRISCOLL: It's all ready. I'll be in.
MRS HARTE: Go on, son. She'll be in.
VINCENT: Michael's crying.
MRS DRISCOLL: I know, I can hear him, can't I?
VINCENT: Look, Eileen's got to go out.
MRS DRISCOLL: Go in, go in. Will you?
MRS HARTE: Go on, son.
VINCENT: Why doesn't she come in?
MRS HARTE: She'll be in.
VINCENT: Our Dad's in.
MRS DRISCOLL: He's not, is he?
VINCENT: No. He isn't.
MRS DRISCOLL: What did you say that for?
VINCENT: Because he will be in. He should be in.
MRS DRISCOLL: Vincent. Vincent Vincent. (*Screaming*) Come here. Oh dear oh dear oh dear.
MRS HARTE: She was a strange girl. Poor girl. And him, he's as ignorant as they come. Like your grandfather Harte. Bloody Bible punching old git. Your grandmother wanted her hair cut when we all did because she used to get so hot in that kitchen with that big range. He wouldn't allow it. He said a woman's hair is her crowning glory, as if the bloody Bible said what length. Ignorant old bigot. I'd have cleaved him open. Bloody Bible punching old git. Like him next door, and he's nothing to write home about. She says she can't find no love in her for her kids and yet look how she keeps them. I wish I had a quarter of her energy and she sends him to church and to a Catholic school. She's a damn sight better than half of them that go. She's a strange girl. She comes from a lovely family. You

should see her sister's home. *She's* a smart woman. And he's years older than her. I don't know whatever she saw in him. I can't bear him. Heavy big dark thing he is.

GERARD: Rattling through my dry mind like peas or lentils or rice, blown through my fingers, across the pane and across my eyes, the grasses tops are thrown. The fields are nervous, their contents quivering. Field after field after field, all shaking with nerves. I'm exhausted looking out of train windows. I'd like to jump out of here at this speed, and retain this speed's magic freedom, unhampered by the moquette seating and that cream and green ceiling and grubby walls and those pictures of the pump room Llandridndrod Wells and pictures of Burnham-on-Sea, and fly out on a kite string, and describe in the air currents and shapes, determined by the train's speed, going and never arriving and feel the occasional tough jerk at the end of my tether, reminding me of restrictions, but feeling its immediate release, billowing me out to freedom and safety and purpose.

MRS HARTE: I wish I could come up when you're ill like that. What did you get ill like that for? I nearly died with worry—you up there and I can't get up to you. How are you?

GERARD: Oh much better.

MRS HARTE: Are you feeling any better?

GERARD: Oh much.

MRS HARTE: You had me worried to death. How did you get ill like that? What were you doing?

GERARD: Nothing.

MRS HARTE: You must have done something to get ill like that.

GERARD: Nothing.

MRS HARTE: You ought to have stopped in the army that time. That's what you ought to have done. You had a good career ahead of you there. You gave up an easy billet there.

GERARD: Literally.

MRS HARTE: In the Far East. It would have killed me. You're drifting away from me. I feel a dead failure . . . I wish I could come up when you're ill like that. Are you feeling better?

GERARD: Much.

MRS HARTE: If anything happened to you, I'd lose my mind. When you ran away I was so frightened.

GERARD: What do you mean, ran away? I never ran away.

MRS HARTE: You just slammed out of the house. Now I think you've run away for good, haven't you?

GERARD: I'm here, aren't I?

MRS HARTE: But you're drifting away from me.

GERARD: I can't stay here. I hate it.

MRS HARTE: Not as much as me. I can tell you.

GERARD: Come back with me.

MRS HARTE: I wouldn't fit in up there.

GERARD: Come back with me. I'll find a place.

MRS HARTE: I'd love it, but it's not to be.

GERARD: Why?

MRS HARTE: Don't ask me, son. That's how it is. I wish I could cry like that.

GERARD: Silly, isn't it.

MRS HARTE: Yes.

GERARD: Come with me please. Oh please. Let's run away together. You and me. For Christ's sake don't cry, mam, it will kill me.

MRS HARTE: I don't cry.

GERARD: Oh Jesus you're crying.

MRS HARTE: I'm not crying.

GERARD: I am.

MRS HARTE: I'm not.

GERARD: Nor am I, now.

MRS HARTE: I never cry.

GERARD: I don't much. NEVER.

MRS HARTE: You always used to cry.

GERARD: You don't cry.

MRS HARTE: No. Leave that to everyone else. I'm sorry I couldn't come up to see you. But you must know me by now. Too much of a coward.

GERARD: I didn't expect it.

MRS HARTE: What do you mean?

GERARD: That I didn't expect you to come up.

MRS HARTE: What's that supposed to mean?

GERARD: What I said.

MRS HARTE: You can be cruel sometimes.

GERARD: Can I?

MRS HARTE: When you going back?

GERARD: I don't know.

MRS HARTE: I expect I'll see you sooner than I think I will.

GERARD: The trees closed like fir cones as the train sped under them and they receded. The sun made a hot ring in the clouds, like its reflection through a magnifying glass on the back of your hand or on paper you want to burn. The train went through the countryside as if it would break the weather. Smoke from a fire stained the air above a whole field. It began to get cooler, and look greener. There were dark patches in the fields. It was as if huge animals had been sleeping in them.

MRS HARTE: I couldn't get you out of my sight at one time, now I think you've run away for good.

GERARD: What say?

MRS HARTE: You're drifting away from me.

GERARD: I'm here, aren't I?

MRS HARTE: But you're drifting away from me.

GERARD: I can't stop here, I hate it.

MRS HARTE: Not as much as me, I can tell you.

GERARD: Let's blow it up.

MRS HARTE: Come here, keep still, you're going grey.

GERARD: What you . . . Don't!

MRS HARTE: How old are you, keep still. When I was your age I had three or four kids.

GERARD: Come back with me.

MRS HARTE: I wouldn't fit in up there.

GERARD: Come back with me. I'll find a place.

MRS HARTE: I'd love it but it's not to be.

GERARD: Why not, why not?

MRS HARTE: Why? Don't ask me. That's how it is. I wish I could cry that.

GERARD: I'm alright, I'm tired off t. train. Silly, isn't it?

MRS HARTE: It is.

GERARD: Come back with me, please. Let's run away together, you and me.

MRS HARTE: Don't talk so soft.

GERARD: I'll never give you up.

MRS HARTE: What?

GERARD: I'd be afraid to.

MRS HARTE: You might have to.

GERARD: No have to. I can order experience in my nut if I want to.

MRS HARTE: You'll soon get snapped up. Come here. You're going grey . . . I had two or three children when I was your age.

GERARD: I'll never give you up.

MRS HARTE: Don't talk so soft. You'll get snapped up.

GERARD: I'd be afraid to.

MRS HARTE: You might have to.

MRS HARTE: I watched it. I would have helped had it been possible. I would have stopped had I known in time. Had one known one would have, don't you think? I wouldn't have wanted it, would I? But I watched from a good seat going through much the same myself.

MRS HARTE: When you ran away.

GERARD: What?

MRS HARTE: You ran away.

GERARD: I didn't run away.

MRS HARTE: For hours it seemed.

GERARD: I'll run away from you.

MRS HARTE: What?

GERARD: You said it often enough.

MRS HARTE: I should have done, that's what I should have done, run away from all of you.

GERARD: I'd like to run away from all of you.

MRS HARTE: What?

GERARD: That's what you said.

MRS HARTE: When you ran away I was so frightened.

GERARD: Don't bring all that up. I only went over the tide.

MRS HARTE: You slammed out of the house.

GERARD: I walked over the tide, I forgot.

MRS HARTE: For hours it seemed.

GERARD: I never said I'd run away.

MRS HARTE: I thought you meant it.

GERARD: I never said I'd run away.

MRS HARTE: You did.

GERARD: It was you.

MRS HARTE: Now you've run away for good.

GERARD: Mam.

MRS HARTE: Yet there was a time I couldn't move without you round me grizzling.

GERARD: When I first come back.

MRS HARTE: What are you saying?

GERARD: When you were first ill I needn't have come back.

MRS HARTE: What?

GERARD: I wasn't writing.

MRS HARTE: You didn't write much.

GERARD: That's what I said.

MRS HARTE: You came back quick enough when it suited you. You'd better go back I think.
GERARD: I wish I hadn't come back, I can tell you. I wish I hadn't left to come back, I wish I hadn't been here to have to come back, I can tell you.
MRS HARTE: That's nice, you needn't come back. On your way brother, pack your bags mate, what do you think I've got to keep you on.
GERARD: What are you talking about? What are you talking about?
MRS HARTE: You'll be the finish of me, you will.
GERARD: You'll see to that, won't you?
MRS HARTE: You're a bully and you always have been a bully. What did you come back for? Go away. Leave me alone. What have you come back for?
GERARD: Because you're the only thing I have to show off with. You're the only thing that contents me. You're the only thing I have. That's all I have. It's all I have. You're all I have.
MRS HARTE: If anyone's heart's broke, it's mine. And to think there was a time I couldn't go to the toilet without you banging on the door.
GERARD: She doesn't exist. Not so long as she's in here. But she's pushing her way out as her fear becomes my hysterical talk. She pushes her way out so I clench my teeth. She pushes against them. Eases through them and I can't close them. They're aching.
GERARD: Look out the back. Look out the back.
MRS HARTE: What?
GERARD: Look at it. Why don't you clear it up? Why don't you? Why don't you?
MRS HARTE: Why should I?
GERARD: Why shouldn't you?
MRS HARTE: God give me patience.
GERARD: Why?
MRS HARTE: I'm sick of it. I'm sick of it. I'm sick of it.

VINCENT: Mrs Harte?
MRS HARTE: Who's that?
VINCENT: It's me.
MRS HARTE: Who's that?
VINCENT: It's me, Mrs Harte.
MRS HARTE: Vincent. Come in, Vincent. What is it? Gerard's out. I don't know where he is. I haven't been in long myself. Haven't you seen him?
VINCENT: No.
MRS HARTE: He won't be long. At least he shouldn't be long. You wait till he *does* come in. Sit down, son.
VINCENT: No thanks.
MRS HARTE: And if you're going out the pair of you be in a bit earlier. Sit down, Vincent. He won't be long.
VINCENT: Do you think you could . . .
MRS HARTE: What, love?
VINCENT: I think the door's stuck. I can't get no answer.
MRS HARTE: Where is she?
VINCENT: The door's stuck. I can't get no answer.
MRS HARTE: Where is she? Vincent. Vincent!
VINCENT: She's in the . . .
MRS HARTE: Vincent.
VINCENT: She's in the . . .
MRS HARTE: Where?
VINCENT: In the . . .
MRS HARTE: When I did go in, I called and called. Then I got the oldest girl to take the other children down their aunts. I kept the baby with me. Where is she? What is it? Where is she?
VINCENT: She's in the . . .
MRS HARTE: I'll go in. You stay here. Gerard won't be long. When I did go in, I tried the door, but I couldn't get it to budge. So I had to get a hammer to it, Mrs Driscoll!
GERARD: Hel—lO! You in here?
VINCENT: Yeah.
GERARD: Where's my mother? Is she in yet? I'll get murdered. I said I'd come straight home. Where is she? What's the matter?
MRS HARTE: Mrs Driscoll.
GERARD: What's the matter?
MRS HARTE: I couldn't get the door to budge. I tried forcing it. But I couldn't get it to budge. So I had to get a hammer to it. Mrs Driscoll! Sheila!
GERARD: Your mother's having a baby, I think.
VINCENT: She is not.
GERARD: She is.
VINCENT: She is not. How would you know?
GERARD: My mother told me.
VINCENT: She did not. She is not.
GERARD: She is. I heard her tell my mother.
MRS HARTE: She wasn't a great deal younger than me . . . silly girl. Oh she was a nice girl. A really nice girl. She didn't look any different, except for the burns on the side of her mouth.
GERARD: You coming out after?
VINCENT: No.
MRS HARTE: Come on now, Mrs Driscoll, love. Mrs Driscoll. Can you hear me, dear? Perhaps if I'd been in earlier? No.
GERARD: Or, come on.
VINCENT: Shut up you.
MRS HARTE: So I had to get a hammer to it. But I couldn't find one.
GERARD: What's the matter?
VINCENT: Oh shut up you.
MRS HARTE: Where's the hammer, Gerard?
GERARD: I don't know. What d'you want a hammer for?
MRS HARTE: Where the hell is it? Where's your father?
VINCENT: He's still in work, I think.
MRS HARTE: Where's your father?
GERARD: *I* don't know.
MRS HARTE: Go on out the two of you. Go on. Go on out. Out.
VINCENT: Mam.
GERARD: What's the matter?
MRS HARTE: It doesn't matter.
GERARD: What's the matter?
MRS HARTE: Be quiet you. Where the hell is it?
VINCENT: Let us in, Mam.
GERARD: What is it, Mam?
VINCENT: Mam.
GERARD: Mam?
MRS HARTE: What?
GERARD: Don't go in there.
MRS HARTE: Why not?
GERARD: I don't like her.
VINCENT: Mammy!
MRS HARTE: What do you mean?
VINCENT: I can't get no answer.
MRS HARTE: Gerard. Run down the presbytery. Damnit all. Go on. The both of you. Go on. Mrs Driscoll! Mrs Driscoll! The oldest girl went to live away. He kept the others except for the baby, who went down the aunties. The oldest boy went to sea. I got splinters in my arm breaking down the door. I brought the baby in with me. I'll bring the baby in here, Vincent. I've sent Eileen down your aunties, love.
GERARD: What's the matter?
MRS HARTE: I couldn't stay there, not after that. Not the same type house. The same lay out. Vincent went to sea I think—I don't know whether it was the Merchant or the Royal. I can't be certain mind you, but I fancy it was the Royal.
GERARD: What's the matter?
VINCENT: Eileen went to live away. *He* kept the others except for the baby who went down my aunties. I went to sea. I see him shuffling round, I got a place when I come home and got them all together. They're all married now. I see their kids. I suppose you think an injustice has been done. To him, I mean. He still works. No he doesn't. He's given it up now. I can't fathom out when she exactly decided it. She give me a note for the chemist. For some cleaning stuff. He wouldn't give it to me. Then he did. Poor bloke.
MRS HARTE: Then he went to sea I think. I don't know whether it was the Merchant or the Royal.
GERARD: It was the Merchant. It was the Merchant.
MRS HARTE: Poor man.
GERARD: Who?
MRS HARTE: Him next door. He was alright. He was a quiet enough bloke.
VINCENT: He was about nine and he was dancing about.
MRS HARTE: I brought the baby in with me.
VINCENT: Coming out, Ger?
GERARD: I can't she won't let me.
MRS HARTE: Then he died.
VINCENT: I was cold.
MRS HARTE: Oh well.
VINCENT: So I went indoors.
MRS HARTE: He was a lovely boy. He was lost at sea.
GERARD: In the other photograph are other children. None of them is me.
MRS HARTE: I scraped all my hand. I got splinters all up my arm.
GERARD: Look at the sky.
VINCENT: Dear Daddy, I hope you are well, that you are in good health and that it's alright where you are. Dear Daddy, I wish you were home. Dear Daddy, I wish you could come home for good. I hope I'll get another postcard again. We all got our cards and we hope you got ours. Lots of love, your son til death—John Vincent O'Driscoll.

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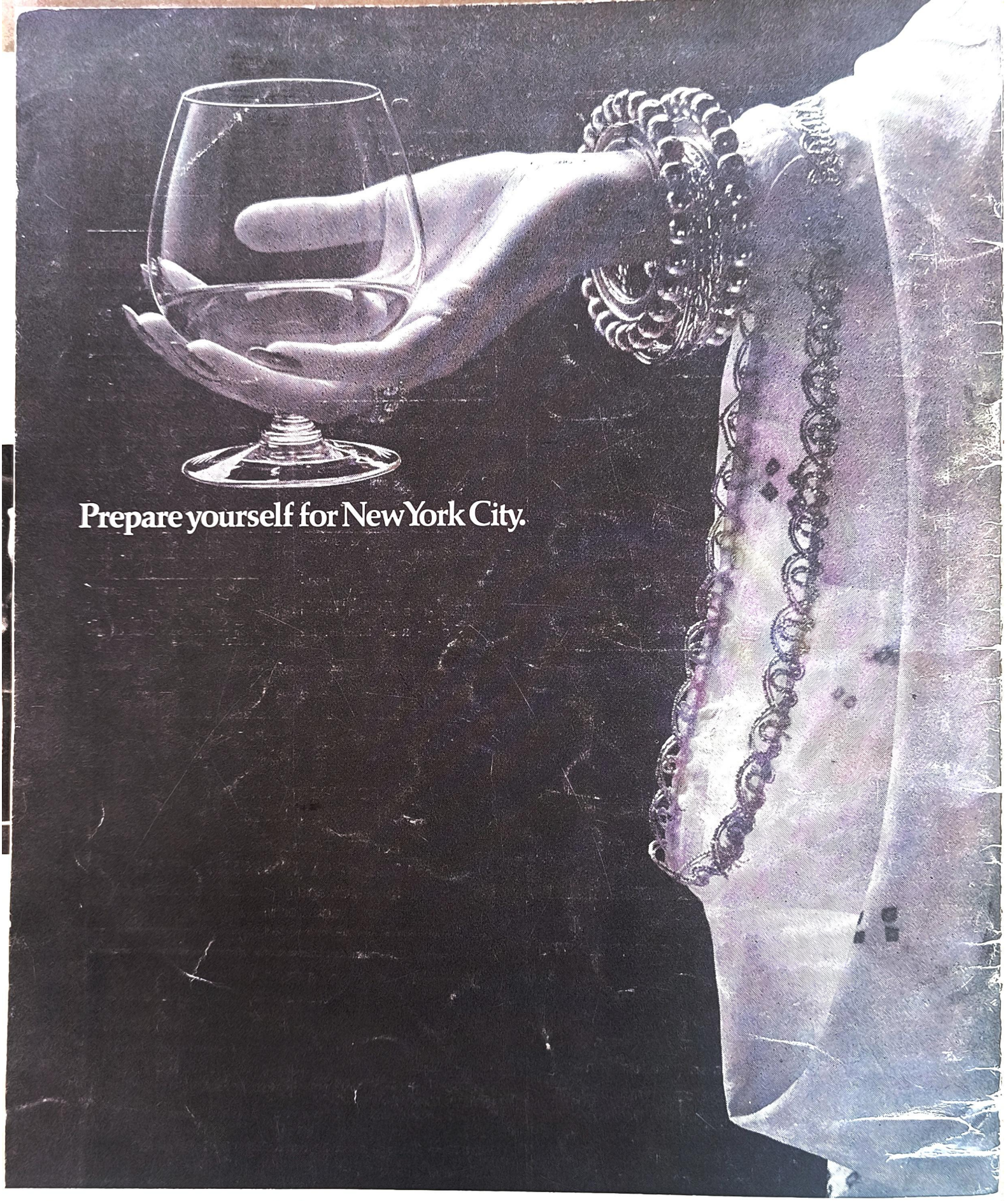

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